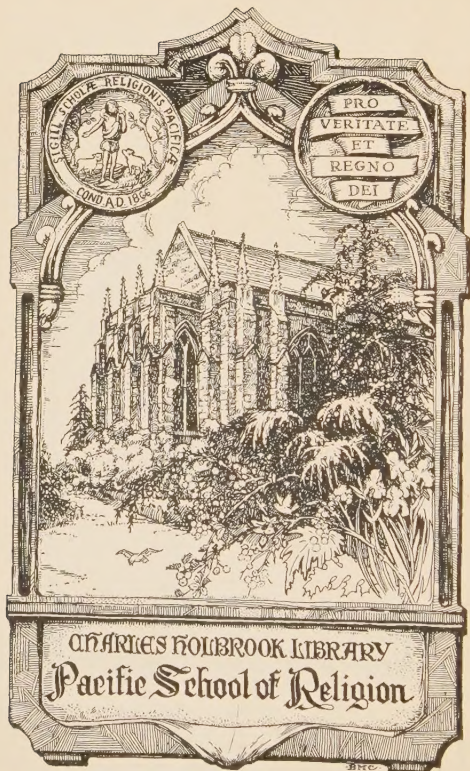




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ADVICE
TO
CHURCH MEMBERS:
OR
SKETCHES OF HUMAN NATURE;
COMPRISING
USEFUL HINTS
RELATING TO
THE DUTIES AND DIFFICULTIES THAT OCCUR IN
THE INTERCOURSE OF CHRISTIANS WITH
ONE ANOTHER AND WITH
THE WORLD.

BY WILLIAM INNES,

MINISTER IN EDINBURGH,

AUTHOR OF "INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG INQUIRERS."

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RECOMMENDATION

FROM THE REV. MR. KEELY,

To the Publisher of this Revised Edition.

Sir,

I AM pleased to learn you are going to bring out a new Edition of "Sketches of Human Life by Innes of Edinburgh." I wish the public may give it that patronage it merits. It is undisputed that a knowledge of human nature in its every-day operations is of great importance to those who are called to move in society. Philosophers have written much upon the physical, moral, and intellectual qualities of man; but their knowledge being acquired in the study, is generally inapplicable to real life. While there is no subject in which man is more directly interested, there is scarcely any upon which he is less informed. Every one supposes the knowledge is easily acquired, and yet almost all fail in the pursuit. We talk much of the art of men to conceal their real character, and endeavour to account for our mistakes upon this. Thus, we flatter ourselves that our failure is not the consequence of either our weakness, indolence, or want of persevering attention; but the unavoidable result of man's habitual disguise and hypocrisy. I doubt this. Disguise and hypocrisy, wherever they are found, are an assumed character. No man can ever sustain an assumed character so as not to be sometimes off his guard. When this is the case, a man of strong mind may look through him, and know all his predominant inclinations. I will allow that disguise is an impediment; but it can exist only to a certain degree.

Why is it, I would ask, that some very sensible men pass a long life without knowing themselves? It will be said, self-esteem blinds them. I admit this may have an influence. But, Sir, the chief reason in my opinion is, the subject is difficult, and very few have ability to master it. It requires also much perseverance, and most men tire before they have acquired the rudiments of the science. It is also mortifying and disgusting to find there should be so little good combined with so much evil; and men sicken at it, and relieve themselves by turning to the gaudy outside of every-day life as professed by the thoughtless multitude; and call it charity. A few only possess the courage to pursue the study while it is developing the mortifying facts which a knowledge of human nature brings to light. INNES, I believe, is one of that number, and cannot fail to be read with interest by the candid and discerning.

The late ANDREW FULLER will be allowed to have known something of man, and of books. I remember he called at my house one evening about thirty years ago, to be ready for the Mail-stage next morning. While sitting together, he said, "I have been reading a new book the last week, which has much interested me." I inquired what it was. He added, "It is Sketches of Human Life, by Innes. It is a good thing. In going round among his friends, he observed their prevailing dispositions, sentiments, and habits, and went home and wrote them down, warm from nature, with his own remarks upon them. You must send, and get the book." I did so, and read it with interest.

If this paper should induce any one to do the same, he will not complain that he was betrayed into a useless expenditure of money, by

Your humble servant,

GEORGE KEELY.

Haverhill, March, 1833,

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

It is here proper to inform the reader, that by the word *churches*, which will be found frequently to occur in this work, is to be understood those societies of professing Christians in which the members, acknowledging one another as disciples of Christ, voluntarily associate together for the purpose of observing his ordinances. Such I conceive to be the description of those societies which, in the apostolic age, received this appellation. It is hoped the remarks will be found to convey useful hints to Christians of all denominations, and who may be found in very different situations.

I recollect, when conversing some time ago with a friend, on the effects of mutual watchfulness, and of the observance of scriptural discipline, he remarked: "One thing, at least, appears very obvious, that, where these are attended to in churches, Christians will find the corruption that is in human nature made much more manifest than in other situations. Now, it has been with me a question, Is this a recommendation of such churches? Those occurrences, it must be allowed, in the history of individuals, which bring the evil that exists in their hearts to light, often form an important source of improvement, as they tend to inspire humility and watchfulness: May not this, then, be the way in which the great Head of the church designed that Christians, in their associated capacity, should promote the improvement of one another?"—Whatever has been the issue of this inquiry, in the case of the individual referred to, the fact on which it is founded is unquestionable. Where Christians acknowledge no authority, and have no bond of union but the word of God, restraints of a merely external kind are in a great measure removed; and as, in the discipline which the Scriptures require to be observed in a Christian church, many things sufficiently disagreeable to human nature must inevitably occur, the observance of that discipline certainly does tend to bring to light much secret depravity, which, in less trying situations, might never have been discovered.

The cases to which the following hints relate are such as frequently occur in real life. To such as are accustomed to observe what is in man, it will be apparent, that the evils mentioned in the following pages, in general, exhibit traces of the workings of our common nature, of that original depravity that is inherent in all, and which, though it is the design and tendency of the Gospel to overcome, is not completely destroyed so long as the Christian tabernacles in his cottage of clay. Medical men have a method of suggesting useful hints in the healing art, by publishing cases in which the symptoms of the patients are particularly described,

along with the treatment they adopted, and the success with which their prescriptions were accompanied. There is not a greater similarity in the bodily constitutions of men than in the complexions of their minds. Something, therefore, of a similar method may perhaps be usefully employed in pointing out the maladies to which Christians in a collective body are subject. Between these two cases, indeed, there is a material difference. In the former, while the physician marks the symptoms of a disease, his own ingenuity must be set to work to discover a remedy. In the latter, we have an infallible remedy at hand; and our only business is to point out the proper application of this remedy, while we persuade men to have recourse to it, by reminding them both of its absolute infallibility, and that nothing else will suit the disorder.

The chief design of the following hints is, that while the reader, under the influence of that impartiality with which we are disposed to judge of a general statement, sees the principles on which men, in certain situations, should act, he may be the better prepared to reduce these principles to practice, when placed in a similar situation himself. I am aware, indeed, there is one powerful obstacle to our making a proper use of any general statement that can be described. This is that perverting influence of self-love, which, wherever we are personally concerned, leads us to view things with a jaundiced eye, and prevents us from judging with that justness and impartiality which we would otherwise discover. It must often have occurred to those accustomed to observe human nature, that in most instances where one man has received a personal offence from another, he is apt to suppose there are some very peculiar circumstances of provocation, — some uncommonly great aggravation, which renders his case very different from almost any other that can be mentioned; and he is surprised if others cannot see every circumstance in the same strong point of view with himself. Now, whence does this supposed peculiarity in general arise? From nothing but his feelings being roused where he is personally interested; while in other cases he is neutral, and, of course, judges dispassionately. No hint of greater importance can be suggested than the necessity of guarding against this very self-love, which is so extremely apt to mislead us, wherever, from our personal feelings or interest being involved, it has an opportunity of operating.

Some persons may consider many of the remarks in the following pages so obvious, that it was in a great measure unnecessary, in such a publication as this, to bring them forward. But it ought to be recollected, that there are babes in Christ, as well as young men and fathers, and that such hints as may seem quite unnecessary to some, may be both necessary and useful to others. The different articles are to be considered as so detached, that each of them may be read separately, without any disadvantage.

ADVICE
TO
CHURCH MEMBERS.



PART FIRST.

OF THE DISCIPLINE OF A CHURCH, OFFENCES, &c.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE IMPROPER TREATMENT OF OFFENCES.

WHEN offences exist in churches, meaning by the expression, those occurrences which prove stumbling blocks to others, and thus lead them into sin, if difficulties be found in the application of discipline, they may generally be traced to some improper steps having been taken at the beginning. In cases of private offence, it is of the utmost importance to keep closely by the rule laid down by our Lord, Matt. 17:15. "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that,

in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he neglect to hear them, tell it to the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican." There is often a partial attention to this rule, while the spirit of it is in a great measure overlooked. This is the case where, though the offended party goes to his brother, he does not go to him *first*. It frequently happens, that one who is offended, instead of strictly adhering to this part of the rule, previously mentions the offence to others. Now, this is exceedingly improper, and seldom fails to produce a bad effect. It is plainly the design of this first step prescribed by our Lord, that if it prove effectual by our brother hearing us, the knowledge of the offence should go no farther. But such a deviation from the rule as that alluded to, is spreading the offence before this preliminary step be adopted.

The following evils are evidently involved in such a conduct, or are likely to flow from it. 1. It is not doing to our brother as we would that he, in similar circumstances, should do to us. 2. Though those to whom we communicate the ground of our offence, should have the prudence not to mention it to others, it is apt to excite in their minds a certain degree of prejudice against the offender. This tends, at least, to weaken their love to him if it should do nothing more, and thus proves injurious to their own minds. 3. If, as frequently happens, it should come to the ears of the individual who has offended us, that we have been speaking of his conduct to others before we came to himself, it throws a great obstacle in the

way of reconciliation. We come as the party offended to him, conceiving that we have nothing to do but receive satisfaction. He, on the other hand, feels himself aggrieved by our conduct, and considers himself, though originally perhaps in the wrong, as entitled to some acknowledgment of our impropriety. When such cases happen, unless there is a great readiness, mutually, to acknowledge whatever is blameable, confidence and cordiality cannot easily be restored.

It sometimes happens that offence is given by a member of a church, if he has heard of any thing objectionable in the conduct of a brother, making inquiry about it in a *circuitous manner*, and not going directly to the individual himself. This is often done under the guise of great caution and prudence. But as it is a device of man, and a deviation from the law of Christ, we cannot reasonably expect it to succeed. However cautiously the inquiry may be conducted, the party about whom it is made very generally hears of it, and the supposed accusation probably comes to him, accompanied with circumstances of aggravation, which, though not a part of it originally, have been attached to it in passing from one to another. Jealousy is thus produced, and charity is wounded. How much better is it to go directly to your brother himself, if you have heard of any thing in his conduct, either of the truth of which you are in doubt, or to which you may have objections, if you know it to be true. By candidly stating the case to himself, you are likely to get the most ample satisfaction. But this is not all: you are not authorized, even in the most cautious manner, to mention

what appears to you an offence on his part, till you have first stated it to himself. If you talk of it to others previously to your doing so, you yourself become an offender.

When two Christians are situated at a distance from one another, and a personal offence takes place between them, in consequence, for example, of the unguarded language of the one having done a real or supposed injury to the character of the other, it will usually be found very difficult to settle it by epistolary correspondence. Where a man is under the influence of chagrin or irritation, the most innocent expressions are apt to be misunderstood; and as some time must elapse before they can be explained, even when explained, the false meaning that was ascribed to them is not easily erased from the mind. How much better is it for brethren, when a personal interview is at all practicable, to subject themselves to considerable inconvenience to obtain it. Difficulties, which perhaps could have never been removed by letters, if persons meet together with a conciliatory spirit, and cheerfully disposed both to give and receive satisfaction, will in half an hour's conversation completely vanish. Thus the literal observance of our Lord's rule, that, if our brother trespass against us, we should *go to him*, will be found productive of the happiest effects. While the parties, in this way, will be led mutually to lament that remaining depravity which is in their hearts, they will be equally constrained to admire that gracious and wise appointment of our divine Master, which is so beautifully calculated to remove the offences that take place among his people, and to

maintain a spirit of peace and love, in spite of that remainder of corruption which is so apt to destroy it.

When an offence is either originally of a public nature, or, though at first private, is necessarily made public by the failure of other steps to remove it, it almost unavoidably becomes, in some measure, the subject of conversation, both among the members of the church, and in the world. The less, however, it is talked of by the former, especially before the matter be fully investigated, so much the better. Before any one makes it the subject of conversation, it would be well to ask, What good is likely to be attained by doing so? If none, should it not rather be avoided? If it is introduced, see that you do not use greater severity in speaking of it to others, than you would do to the offending individual himself. If at any time you have occasion to mention the statement or opinion of another in regard to it, see that you give it no additional colouring, but endeavour to repeat it simply as you received it.

One reason why we ought most cautiously to guard against any impropriety in our temper or conduct, in dealing with an offending brother, is, that if he has fallen into sin, it is of much importance, not only that he be restored, but that his fall may become the occasion of his reaping some spiritual advantage. Now, when does this take place? When the offender is humbled, under a sense of his guilt, discovers more of the deceitfulness of his own heart, and is thus led to increased watchfulness. But if a man has done what is wrong, nothing is more natural than to seek for some mitigation of his offence; some sort of gratification in discovering

that he is not the only offender, but that the conduct of others presents something that is blameworthy, as well as his own. It is much to be regretted, when any handle is given on which this malignant propensity can fasten. When this is the case, the offender, instead of being humbled at his own criminality, is apt to feel a sort of secret consolation, at the thought that others, in some measure, keep him in countenance; that if guilt be incurred, he is not the only offender, but that it is only a share of that guilt that can be imputed to him. Whenever any one professing godliness feels a satisfaction from this quarter, let him take the alarm. It is the signal of danger; it indicates the influence of that spirit of self-deception which men often indulge, in order to keep them from that humiliation which a sense of guilt should produce. Let such a one recollect, that "every man must bear his own burden;" that his personal conduct ought to be viewed quite detached from that of those who may have incurred blame along with him; that his guilt cannot be mitigated by that of others, however great.

The following is one way, among others, in which a spirit of self-justification is often manifested. If the charge that is brought against a man be at all of a complex nature, he is apt to fix with eagerness on any part of it, which is either unfounded altogether, or exaggerated; and the circumstance of one small part of it (perhaps something even merely incidental) being false, is frequently considered as mitigating, if not altogether doing away, the criminality of what is true. Now, this is a most unhappy propensity; and wherever there is a disposition to dwell on such

a circumstance, there is no evidence of genuine humiliation for what is wrong. Though, in bringing a charge, some circumstances should be misrepresented or exaggerated, there may be others which, according to the most impartial view of them, contain matter of the most just accusation.

It ought, in this case, to be more the concern of the offender to be humbled, where the ground of accusation is just, than to defend himself, because some part of the charge brought against him is unfounded. This suggests a hint to those who meet with what offends them in the conduct of others, and which they have occasion to reprove. Let them cautiously guard against exaggerating any circumstance. Let them scrupulously inquire into the truth of every thing they advance, that the effect of their reproof may not be lost by some inaccurate representation, which the party reproved may lay hold of, and which may seem to furnish him with an apology for self-defence, or irritation, instead of leading him to godly sorrow for his conduct. Above all, let it ever manifestly appear, that reproof, wherever administered, is dictated by genuine affection to him who is the subject of it.

CHAPTER II.

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPARTIALITY IN THE BRETHREN CALLED UPON TO ASSIST IN REMOVING AN OFFENCE.

IN cases of offence, where it becomes necessary to have recourse to the second step in our Lord's rule, viz. to take one or two more, to see if the offender will hear them, it is of the utmost importance that the brethren thus employed should examine the subject with the most unbiassed and unprejudiced minds. It may sometimes happen that, from their previous view of the character of the one or the other party, they may be disposed to lean to the one side or the other, before the whole circumstances of the case be laid before them. Now, this is what ought to be carefully avoided. They ought to guard against any tendency, even in their own minds, to prejudge the case, till both parties be fully heard. Much, in the way of removing offences, often depends on the temper and judgment manifested by the brethren employed on such an occasion. If they form a false decision, either from want of discernment or from partiality, it tends to irritate the party, who is not conscious of being blameworthy, while it encourages and screens the aggressor, and thus prevents him from being brought to that humiliation, on account of his conduct, which it is one great design of discipline to produce.

It is necessary, at the same time, for the party really aggrieved in such a case, to recollect, that the brethren called in may at first form an inaccurate judgment, merely from not fully understanding the subject, without any intended partiality. Much temper and patience are of course requisite in the person who has just cause of offence. As he knows all the circumstances of the case, he is apt at once to fix in his own mind the decision that ought to be formed, without giving others time to know them as well as himself. I have seen a person, in this situation, betray a very improper spirit, because the brethren called upon could not all at once decide in his favour, though the hesitation arose only from an imperfect acquaintance with the circumstances, and was completely removed by more correct information. A man must be very ignorant of human nature indeed, if he expects that others are to enter into a case in which he is personally implicated, as warmly as he does himself. No ! What he views with the deepest interest, others will contemplate as a matter of comparative indifference ; and an offence, which he sees clothed with circumstances of such high and peculiar aggravation, that he can hardly view it with any temper, and conceives that a similar one is scarcely to be found, to his astonishment will appear to others as nothing different from what happens every day. Such is the deceitful influence of self-love. When stated in general, we recognise the justness of the representation ; but how apt are all to be sadly misled by it, wherever a case occurs in which, from the nature of the circumstances, this principle is called forth ?

It may sometimes happen, that after an offence, originally of a private kind, has, in consequence of the failure of other attempts to remove it, been brought before a church, a delay may be requisite, on account of the unexpected absence of one whose testimony is necessary, or of some other cause. In such a case, it is of equal importance, that all the members should keep their minds unbiassed till the whole evidence be laid before them. They are sometimes in danger, from the particular neighbourhood in which they live, or from their intimacy with one of the parties, to listen to a partial representation of the matter, and are thus prepared in their own minds to exculpate the one, and condemn the other, before the case be fully heard. But though the decision ultimately pronounced by the pastor should be obviously the right one, such a practice as that referred to is apt to excite a certain degree of prejudice, from which a schismatical spirit (*i. e.* a spirit hostile to the circulation of mutual confidence and affection,) is very likely to flow. If one part of the members may with propriety hear one statement of the case, may not another part with equal propriety listen to another? A foundation is thus laid for secret surmising and dissatisfaction; and though there can be no room for objections after the true state of the case is ascertained, and the application of the law of Christ pointed out, yet there may be a want of that cordiality in the decision, which every member of a church ought to feel where the laws of the Lord Jesus are faithfully executed.

CHAPTER III.

CHURCHES CALLED TO JUDGE ONLY ON EVIDENCE.

THAT churches may judge with propriety of cases of discipline laid before them, and that they may thus heartily acquiesce in the administration of that discipline as conducted by their rulers, they ought never to forget the maxim of Scripture, that it is "in the mouth of two or three witnesses that every word is to be established." This was the rule according to which the punishments inflicted by the law of Moses were to be put into execution. Thus Deut. 17:6, "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death." This is also noticed in the epistle to the Hebrews, 10:38; "He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses." The same regulation under the New Testament, is repeatedly enjoined. Thus the establishing of the fact by sufficient evidence is mentioned as the principal design of the second step of our Lord's rule, already quoted from Matt. 18:16. When the offended brother is required to take one or two more with him, one object at least of doing so seems to be, that if it become necessary to lay the matter before the church at large, they might proceed upon evidence; for the reason added is,

“that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” In like manner, Paul, in his first epistle to Timothy, calls upon him, Chap. 5:19, “Not to receive an accusation against an elder, but before two or three witnesses.” And when this same Apostle had the prospect of visiting the church of Corinth, where there was much to reprove, he says, 2 Cor. 13:1. “This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.”

Now, it is of the utmost importance for the members of a church to keep this regulation constantly in their eye. From it we learn, that they cannot with propriety form a decision, unless they have that evidence to proceed upon, which the law expressly requires: nay, though they should form a decision, which may ultimately prove a just one, if they act without this evidence, it is not a decision formed in a scriptural way. Sometimes, when a case comes before a church, some of the members, from the personal knowledge they may possess of the circumstances, come with their minds perfectly made up respecting what ought to be done, without considering whether they have evidence sufficient to adduce, upon which their brethren, who have no access to such knowledge, can form the same judgment. I have known a member of a church leave it, because his brethren could not decide in a case of discipline, merely upon his personal report of a private conversation between him and another member, while the other party gave quite a different account of it. Now, this plainly indicated either gross ignorance, or a temper not in subjection to

the authority of Christ. Could any thing have been more unscriptural and more unreasonable than a decision formed in this way? The report, it is true, might be most faithfully given; but, though the party himself might be conscious of this, there was here a manifest want of that evidence which the word of God expressly requires.

These remarks may assist us in the solution of a question, which has usually been considered to be one of some difficulty. Suppose one member of a church has the fullest access to know that another has committed some very bad action, but the person who has done so chooses to deny it, and no evidence can be laid before the church to establish the charge: The question then is; ought such a person, though he is completely satisfied respecting the criminality of the offender, to remain in the same church with one whom he knows to be so very improper a character? I have no hesitation in saying, that he ought; and upon this ground, that I see no warrant a man has to leave a society, which he views as a church of Christ, unless he discovers something in their conduct as a body, which he has reason to condemn, and which, notwithstanding all his remonstrances, they will not correct. Now if, on the ground above stated, a person were to forsake a church, he would be doing so, while at the same time he could not charge his brethren with any thing that was blameworthy; for it must be admitted, that whatever inconsistency of character in another had come under his personal knowledge, they were not authorized to act upon it, unless he had evidence to produce. Laws must be made for general cases,

and they must proceed on certain fixed principles. It has been justly observed, respecting the laws that regulate succession to property in this country, that some cases might be mentioned, nay, such occasionally occur, in which the execution of the law may really violate material justice. It is more, however, for the general good, that a few cases of this nature should exist, than that this important point should, by deviating from a fixed rule, be left vague and undetermined. The same remark is applicable here. The laws of the Lord Jesus proceed on certain fixed principles. They require a church to act only upon evidence. This regulation must unavoidably allow transgressors to escape, against whom such evidence cannot be brought. But this is a far less evil than the confusion, the partiality, and injustice, that must flow from deviating in any degree from this plain rule of material justice.

Those who know, then, that there are improper characters in a church, while they are retained in it, not from a disposition to wink at their wickedness, but merely from want of evidence against them, have no reason to feel uneasiness at remaining with them in the same society. We here go upon the supposition that nothing has been omitted, which could be done to bring the offenders to a sense of their guilt. If these attempts are unsuccessful, and such persons are not brought to repentance, they are likely soon to give evidence what their characters really are. But should they even continue deceivers to the last, the church will not be found to blame for not excluding those against whom sufficient evidence of their criminality could not be adduced.

But farther: removing, in such a case, to another church, while it might please the individual, would not remove the offence. Still, the conduct of the aggressor would be a stumbling-block, while he continued to make a profession, and acted so inconsistently; and he would be less likely to be brought to repentance, when the man who knew his guilt, and had expostulated with him, had withdrawn from the society. But though we have stated this case, and endeavoured to show what seems to be the path of duty on its occurrence, we may add, it is one that is very unlikely to take place, where Christian discipline, and mutual watchfulness, are observed. In such societies, when men become openly careless, and begin to indulge in sinful habits, they seldom render it necessary to wait for an opportunity of excluding them. They usually find the watchfulness and inspection of their brethren too troublesome to be long endured, and, in order to get quit of it, they generally of their own accord withdraw from the society.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTIANS OUGHT TO GUARD AGAINST TOO EASILY TAKING OFFENCE.

WHEN an offence takes place between one Christian and another, from what appears a personal injury, the spirit of the gospel will dispose the

offended party to explain that part of his brother's conduct, which is the ground of the offence, in as favourable a way as possible. He will see if it can be imputed to a deficiency in the offender's knowledge of some part of divine truth, — or to a casual neglect, — or to some view which, though false, was conscientiously held by him, — or to some peculiarity in his temper, or situation in life, which particularly exposed him to temptation. This is the manner in which the law of love naturally operates. We discover this every day in the attempts which the partiality of friendship disposes us to make, in order to apologize for those parts of the conduct of one to whom we are attached, which really may in themselves be in a great measure indefensible.

We may indeed go too far in justifying a friend's conduct to the world; and if we do so, it may have a pernicious effect: we may in this way sacrifice truth to personal attachment. But I question if it be possible to go too far in endeavouring to mitigate, in our own minds, what appears to us a personal injury. One thing is certain, that if there be an extreme on this side, it is one into which men very rarely fall, while they almost universally fall into the opposite one. It is equally certain, that while such a disposition to take the most favourable view we possibly can of a man's conduct, who has offended us, is evidently that which the spirit of the Gospel inspires, it greatly tends to prepare the mind for the removal of the offence, and for the complete restoration upon a reasonable concession of mutual confidence and affection.

But, of all considerations, that which is calculated

most effectually to subdue every improper feeling here, is a deep conviction how much we ourselves need forgiveness. There must be a great deficiency in our impression of this truth, if we do not discover the utmost readiness to promote a reconciliation. Our Lord taught his disciples to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors;" and on this part of his prayer we have his own infallible commentary: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matt. 6:14. The necessity of habitually cultivating a forgiving temper, is also finely illustrated in that beautiful parable, which is recorded, Matt. 18:23. to the end.

While the preceding observations regard the conduct of Christians as individuals, do we not also find that they are sometimes too apt to take offence in their associated capacity? This seems to be the case when a church separates from its communion one who merely differs from them on a point which they themselves confess does not affect the evidence of that individual's Christianity.

CHAPTER V.

THE IMPROPRIETY OF PARTIALLY FORSAKING THE
COMMUNION OF A CHURCH, ON ACCOUNT OF A
PRIVATE OFFENCE.

IT is not uncommon to find members of churches, who, whenever they meet with any thing that offends them in the conduct of their brethren, or even hear of it in the form of a surmise, immediately withdraw from the communion till their difficulties be removed. Now, this practice appears totally indefensible, from any thing either in the express precepts, or general spirit of the word of God. What has come to the knowledge of an individual may not yet have come to the knowledge of the church. If so, the communion of the church is not defiled; and we are not to renounce the communion of the whole church, on account of what we know about one of their number. If, from unavoidable circumstances, a case of discipline be delayed, the spirit of the Gospel certainly requires that I consider my brother innocent till he be proved guilty. We may here remark, however, by the way, that churches ought to guard against any unnecessary delay in following out cases of discipline; and, where the guilt is manifest and gross, exclusion should not be delayed at all.*

* Here I refer to such characters as those mentioned, 1 Cor. 5 : 11. In verse 13 will be found the rule by which such characters are to be treated.

If there is want of evidence of a person's criminality, we have already seen that a church cannot proceed. If there is evidence, and the law of Christ is applied as soon as that evidence is brought forward, no plea for partially withdrawing from the communion is to be found.

Two passages of Scripture have sometimes been urged in defence of this practice. The one is, 1 Cor. 11:17, where the members of the church at Corinth, when they met, under the pretence of eating the Lord's Supper, are said to come together, not for the better, but for the worse. But this has no connexion with the point before us. What the apostle is here condemning, is the irregular and tumultuous manner in which they assembled, and by which they perverted a solemn ordinance of Christ to a scene of feasting and drunkenness. This is apparent from the following context. The other passage is Matt. 5:23. "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first, be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." It has been supposed, from these words, that if one member of a church is offended with another, he is called to withdraw from the communion of the church, till his offence be removed. The import, however, of the leading clause in this passage is overlooked. It is not said, and there rememberest *that thou hast aught against thy brother*, but *that thy brother hath aught against thee*. It points out the propriety, not of the offended party abstaining from the communion of the church; but of one who has

given cause of offence to another, going immediately and having it removed. If any one has done so, we will allow he can with no propriety join in fellowship with his brethren, while this plain duty is neglected. But if he do so, the guilt lies with himself. The offended party is not to blame in being there, nor is the church blameable in the offender being present, while they are either ignorant of the offence, or, after they know it, lose no time in getting it substantiated if it can be proved, and in applying to the delinquent the discipline of the word of God. In this way, the passage before us very much corresponds with the admonition the apostle gives to the church at Corinth, 1 Cor. 5:8; "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of *malice* and *wickedness*, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

There appears, then, to be no scriptural authority for *occasionally* withdrawing from the communion of a church. If we are connected with a professedly Christian society, we can only withdraw from it from a conviction that it is not a church of Christ; that it is a society, either originally resting on an unscriptural foundation, from its deliberately uniting in its constitution the church and the world; or, whatever it may have been at first, that it is now incorrigibly obstinate in neglecting or opposing some of the commandments of the Lord Jesus. In such a case, we are called, not occasionally to abstain from its fellowship, but completely to separate from it, that we may obey the command of the apostle to turn away from those who have a form of godliness, but deny its power, and that thus we may not

be partakers of other men's sins. 2 Tim. 3:5; 2 John 11.

We need hardly remark how unseemly it is to see brethren absent from the communion, while few or none know the cause of it; and how little this is calculated to exhibit to the world that mutual affection, harmony, and confidence, which a church of Christ ought to present. Nay, it ought to be remembered, how much such a practice may tend to impair the discipline of a church. If we inquire after one who is absent from carelessness, is there not something very wrong, if such a person can find a cloak for his carelessness, by quoting the example of others who are frequently absent likewise, though their absence may arise from another cause? We hope, then, that Christian brethren, who have hitherto proceeded on the supposition, that such a practice was a proper one, (and I have no doubt many have observed it conscientiously,) when they find it unsupported by Scripture, and apt to be accompanied with consequences so pernicious, will feel their obligations unreservedly to relinquish it.

On this subject, it may be proper to add a caution to Christians against indulging a disposition to wander to other places of worship on the Lord's day, at least during the time that the church with which they are connected regularly assemble. The evil of this is manifest. If one may gratify such an idle curiosity, why may not others do the same? and if all did so, the divinely instituted assembly of a church of Christ to observe his ordinances would be destroyed. But while I would caution Christians against the impropriety to which I have alluded, by

pointing out the pernicious effects that would result were it generally committed, I would be understood as confining my remarks to those seasons when the members meet in a church capacity. It would appear to me an unreasonable abridgment of Christian liberty for any church to prevent their members from attending at other times any place of worship where their spiritual improvement may be promoted.

CHAPTER VI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING OFFENCES AS SPEEDILY REMOVED AS POSSIBLE.

EVERY Christian ought to be not only willing, but solicitous, as early as possible, to give all the satisfaction he can to any brother, who, through a mistake of his language, a misrepresentation of any part of his conduct, or any other cause, may be offended at him. If he neglect to do this immediately, the offence rankles in the mind of his brother; and the longer it remains, it gets the firmer hold, and of course it becomes the more difficult to root it out. The offended party is apt to brood over it. It is in danger of intruding upon him in his hours of retirement, and when he would wish most completely to banish it from his thoughts. It wounds the love he ought to bear to his brother. It obstructs his spirituality; and instead of proceeding with alacrity

in the Christian life, his hands hang down, and his knees wax feeble. He has literally met with a *stumbling block*,* which, by being thrown in his way, makes him fall, and retards his progress in running the race set before him.

Now, does not the blame of this party, at least, lie at his door, who was unwilling to give the fullest explanation, that was compatible with duty, in order to get any misunderstanding done away as soon as possible. If Christians were properly aware of the measure of guilt in the temper of others, to which they may become accessory, by withholding such acknowledgments as may tend to remove differences, they would tremble at the thought of it, and, instead of endeavouring to ascertain the degree of explanation they are called in strict justice to give, or which may be consistent with their own supposed dignity, they would have no other limit to their attempt at a reconciliation, but that which a dispassionate consideration of the line of duty, and tender Christian solicitude for the safety and prosperity of the souls of their brethren, would point out.

* The import of the original word used for offence. See Rom. 14:20.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN AN OFFENCE MAY BE CONSIDERED AS
REMOVED.

WHERE an offence has taken place, we should never suppose it removed till love be restored. Never let false delicacy, or a wish to avoid trouble, lead any one, in such a case, to disguise his sentiments. Let the matter be fully examined without delay. Better take a little more time, and trouble too, that the difference, if possible, may be effectually done away, than huddle up the business, by professing satisfaction when it is not real. If a difference be thus superficially patched up, merely for the sake of peace, or to avoid the discipline of the church, or the censure of such of the brethren as may be acquainted with it, it will prove like a wound not properly healed. When it meets with the most trifling injury, it is perpetually apt to break out afresh.

One way in which an old offence is thus sometimes revived, is by referring to it, if any new cause of difference between the parties should afterwards take place. This is exceedingly improper. Wherever a profession of repentance for an offence has been made on the one hand, and accepted on the other, it should never be touched upon afterwards, whatever subsequent difference may happen. I have sometimes found, when a member of a church

had occasion to reprove a brother, though the reproof was allowed to be just, if any thing had ever occurred in the history of the reprover, which served to afford matter of crimination, recourse was had to it, in order to take off the edge of the reproof that was given. This plainly showed that it was not received in a proper spirit. Such a person had no more title thus to recal what was past, than a merchant would have to resort to an old account, which had been settled long ago, in adjusting some new debt. If what is thus mentioned by the reproved party be something of a private nature, which was known to him, but which he never brought forward before, by introducing it now, he condemns himself. If it was really an offence, why did he not bring it forward sooner? He was surely chargeable with a criminal violation of the law of love, in not taking notice of it earlier, and making it the subject of admonition or reproof. We shall only add, that, mentioning any thing of this kind to others, though not to the person himself, by whom the reproof is administered, is equally inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO REMOVE OFFENCES, MUTUAL CONCESSION IS
GENERALLY NECESSARY.

WHEN one member of a church receives an offence from another, a willingness to make concessions on both sides is in general necessary to the removal of it. Even where there may be much blame on the part of the individual who gives the offence, as it seldom happens from the imperfection of human nature that it is treated altogether in the spirit of the Gospel, an impartial observer will generally discover that there are faults on both sides. If the one party, then, insist that he is entirely in the right, while the other is entirely and exclusively in the wrong, it is extremely difficult to promote reconciliation. On this account, whenever a person in a case of this nature can conscientiously say, that in some points it would have been better had he acted otherwise, (and it is seldom necessary for a man to stretch his conscience to say so,) he ought cheerfully to do it. If the party offended be willing to admit this much, though the impropriety with which he is chargeable be nothing compared with that of the other, such a concession will tend greatly to promote a reconciliation, and to lead the offender to see the evil of his conduct.

If one man has given such obvious ground of offence to another, that, as the phrase is, he may be

said fairly *to have committed himself*, the spirit of the world would dispose the offended party not to be reconciled, till he got the aggressor completely humbled, and thus obtained a sort of personal triumph. The spirit of the Gospel, on the other hand, which regards not the gratification of our own pride, but the restoration of an offending brother, will make us thankful for any appearance of his being convinced he is wrong, and dispose us to restore him, in as easy a manner as we can judge to be at all consistent with fidelity to his soul. Instead of peremptorily demanding the strongest language of confession and humiliation, it will lead us rather, in the first instance, to try the effect of a forgiving disposition, in order to promote the spirit of genuine repentance. In this case, the more we demand, the less we usually gain. It is commonly after the exercise of such a forgiving spirit, that the offender most deeply feels the impropriety of his conduct.

Here, we have an admirable model for our imitation, in the manner in which our divine Master treats his offending people. How does he overcome them, and destroy their rebellion against him? Is it by keeping them at a distance, and refusing to receive them? No! but, by the riches of his condescension and grace, he disarms their opposition. He melts down their pride, stubbornness, and disobedience, by heaping coals of fire on their heads. It is in the same way we ought to endeavour to gain an offending brother. If we are influenced by a desire to gratify our own spirit, we shall be disposed to bring the offender in submission to our own feet. If we supremely aim at his spiritual profit, we shall be

more concerned to bring him to the feet of our Master.

How finely is this illustrated in the conduct of the father in our Lord's beautiful parable of the returning prodigal ! There is no demand of deep humiliation, — no appearance on the part of the father of a difficulty to be won, or of a hesitation in accepting the first expressions used by his offending child, of his regret and humiliation. He hails with joy the first symptoms of his sense of guilt. He does not allow him to finish the speech, short as it was, he had proposed to address to him, before he interrupts him with the language of kindness and forgiveness. This parable, like all the rest delivered by our blessed Lord, clearly indicates, that he who spoke it intimately knew what is in man. But when we recollect who is represented by the father in this parable, let us at the same time remember our obligations to be "followers (imitators) of God, as dear children," and "to be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful." Eph. 5:1; Luke 6:36.

We shall only farther remark, that there is often a danger of gratifying our own pride, when one has offended us, under the plausible guise of solicitude about our brother's spiritual good, and that he may be properly humbled, on account of the evil manifested in his conduct. Every one who knows the deep deceitfulness of the human heart, will strongly perceive the necessity of being on his guard here. Such a solicitude ought undoubtedly to be felt; but we should beware of confounding it with that self-gratulation, which is apt to arise from our supposed superiority to our offending brother. This belongs

to a very different spirit; and as it is by far more common to demand too much, on such an occasion, in the way of confession, than too little, wherever this extreme is to be found, whatever plausible pretence it may assume, it may in most cases be very fairly traced to the unhallowed principle of secret triumph and self-gratification.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPIRIT WITH WHICH DISCIPLINE OUGHT TO BE ADMINISTERED.

WHEREVER either private reproof or the public discipline of the house of God is administered, it ought ever to be done from sincere love to the offender, and under a sense of deep humiliation before God, on account of that departure from the law of Christ, which renders such reproof or discipline necessary. The reproof of a private offence should be accompanied with the most heartfelt regret that the offender should have fallen into sin, and a tender solicitude that he may be suitably affected with it, and restored. Where, in consequence of the failure of the other steps appointed by our Lord to remove an offence, it is unavoidably laid before the church, and public reproof must be administered, in addition to our concern for the offender, we ought to feel for the occasion that is given, by the incon-

sistent walk of professors, to the enemies of the Lord Jesus, to speak reproachfully. Again, where it is necessary, on account of gross iniquity, to have recourse to immediate exclusion, even this step must be conducted with that all-pervading spirit, by which every thing that is connected with Christianity is distinguished, — the spirit of Christian love. It ought to be done from love to the offender, that he may be brought to repentance ; from love to the cause of the Lord Jesus, that it may not be reproached by countenancing men in iniquity ; and from love to the general body, that they also may fear. Every case of discipline, the members of a church should consider as an affecting and impressive commentary on that text of sacred writ ; “ Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

It is a truth, which cannot be too strongly inculcated, that the external forms prescribed in Scripture may be observed where the spirit of them is totally wanting. Nay, it is possible to be very zealous for the observance of the form, while that zeal may be expressed in a spirit very different from the spirit of the Gospel. If a private offender, for example, is reproved, not in love, but in an opposite temper, the reprover in this case becomes himself an offender against the law of Christ. In like manner, if, when public discipline is administered, we should feel, in consequence of some previous difference we may have had with the person who is the subject of this discipline, a secret gratification that he has fallen into sin ; that he has met with something to humble him, and that now his character is made manifest, and that it only confirms the view we entertained of

him formerly ; such a spirit is diametrically opposite to the spirit of the Gospel ; and if we are capable of indulging it, this very circumstance furnishes an awful proof, that whatever our profession be, we are yet ignorant of genuine Christianity, or at least are at that moment not living under its practical influence.

CHAPTER X.

SOME OF THE BENEFITS ARISING FROM THE EXERCISE OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE.

DISCIPLINE discovers the evil that is in the heart. In this way, among others, it is calculated to be peculiarly useful. Where true Christianity exists, nothing tends more to the improvement of the character, than those incidents that manifest the latent evil that is within. So much is this the case, that if we could ascertain the real discovery a man has of his own heart, by distinguishing it from the false professions many make upon this subject, we should find it a very accurate standard by which to judge of his attainments in true godliness. The exercise of discipline, then, tends much to promote this discovery, particularly where circumstances occur, tending to irritate. Such cases frequently prove like afflictions to a Christian, not for the present joyous, but grievous. They often give both to the individual implicated, and to others, a melancholy

discovery of remaining corruption, which, but for such an occurrence, might never have been known. This, on reflection, however, produces effects the most valuable. It inspires humility; it gives more enlarged views, and communicates a deeper impression of the necessity and importance of pardoning mercy; it disposes us more to bear with the imperfections of our brethren; and it leads to increased watchfulness.

The exercise of discipline, also, often tends to discover hypocrites in a church. A Christian may be overcome by temptation, and manifest a most improper spirit, at a time when any thing particularly trying to his temper occurs; but his Christianity will be manifested by the subsequent effects, by the superior influence of his principles, not only preventing him from continuing in such a state of mind, but leading him to derive benefit even from his fall. A hypocrite, on the other hand, will deliberately allow a cause of irritation to rankle in his mind, and thus discover he is a stranger to the forgiving spirit of the Gospel. In both cases, the effects are most useful. In the first, as we have already remarked, this is obvious; and with regard to the second, nothing is of greater consequence, both to a church and to an individual, than the discovery of real character. If any one should creep into a church who is a mere professor, the sooner he is detected the better, not only for himself, but for all connected with him. His remaining in the church can only contribute to administer to his own delusion, while he continues to have a form of godliness, though destitute of its power: and the injury the rest of the

members may receive from him, is manifest from the plain principle stated in Scripture, that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." 1 Cor. 5:8.

If the foregoing remarks be just, will it not follow as a consequence, that, when any one is betrayed into a sin, either in his temper, his conversation, or his conduct, the strength of his Christian principles, and of course the reality of his Christian character will appear, by the readiness he manifests to acknowledge what is evil, and explicitly to renounce it. Let Christians, then, tremble at the thought of defending, through the indulgence of pride, what they are conscious is wrong, or of being prevented by it, from perceiving, that a thing is wrong which the word of God declares to be so.

PART SECOND.

OF THE PERNICIOUS EFFECTS OF TALE-BEARING,
OF JUDGING AND SPEAKING RASHLY, &c.

CHAPTER I.

THE EFFECTS OF A TATTLING DISPOSITION.

Nothing tends more to disturb the peace of churches than a tattling disposition in the members, or their spending their time in talking of the characters and circumstances of their neighbours. Hence those societies which, in any tolerable measure, attend to the discipline of the house of God, must see a peculiar propriety in the frequency with which the apostles of our Lord caution the members of Christian churches against this evil. When any differences arise from this quarter, it generally happens that there are three parties to blame. *First*, the person who unguardedly speaks evil of the character of a brother. *Secondly*, the person to whom it is mentioned, for retailing it, and not rather reproving the informer, and desiring him to go directly to the individual himself, against whom the supposed charge is alleged. *Thirdly*, the party spoken of, for indulging immediate irritation or resentment whenever he hears of the story, and not

suspending his judgment of the conduct of the aggressor, till he fully inquire into the matter, and take dispassionately under review all the circumstances of the case. Even when the guilt of the tattler and backbiter is clearly established, it is plainly the duty of the aggrieved party, in meekness, to go and reprove what is wrong; and where such a spirit is wanting, whatever be the guilt of the other party, he himself is plainly much to blame.

The members of a church are also sometimes apt to hear the opinions which some of their brethren have expressed of their character, or of some part of their conduct, not merely from their fellow-members, but from the world. Now, such reports ought to be received with the utmost caution. Worldly men often discover a malignant pleasure in endeavouring to set Christians at variance. It seems to afford them some sort of consolation to find that the disciples of Christ, when they meet with what is calculated to irritate them, can discover the same evil tempers with themselves. In this way reports are often found in circulation, which have not even the shadow of a foundation, and which it seems impossible to trace to any source, but a malignant desire to promote dissension. In other cases, where they have some sort of foundation, and of course cannot be considered as altogether fabricated, they will generally be found in their progress to be at least greatly exaggerated.

If we would act properly here, we must guard against forming a hasty decision, or allowing prejudice to get possession of the mind, before we have made the most minute and unbiassed investigation,

It will be useful to inquire into the particular train of conversation by which a sentiment or an expression, calculated to offend us, is said to have been introduced. This will often give to it quite a different aspect from what, if retailed in its insulated state, it will possess. Nay, a very small variation in the mode of expression, or even in the tone of voice with which it is uttered, will often help considerably to ascertain the temper and design of the speaker. It will frequently be found, that unguarded and foolish things about the conduct of others are said, merely for the want of other topics of conversation, where there is no reason to suspect a deliberate evil design. Though this is no apology for using such language, it ought surely to be considered as a circumstance of much mitigation.

Thus, while the sin of tale-bearing, and its evil effects, are most manifest, the duty of those whose characters may suffer by it, is no less apparent. Let a double guard be put upon their temper, when they meet with what is so much calculated to irritate them. Let the first impulse of anger or resentment be strenuously resisted. By coolly inquiring into the false report that may be circulated, and treating it with that spirit which the Gospel enjoins, we follow the example of Him who was meek and lowly, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, who was the grand pattern as well as the author of forgiveness. We thus also give a fresh blow to inward corruption. We thwart the design of the grand enemy of souls to betray us unto sin. We disappoint the malignant hopes of the ungodly, who wish to see us indulge the same evil tempers with them-

selves. And if a Christian brother be the offender, we are most likely, by the manifestation of such a temper, to carry home upon his mind a deep sense of the criminality of his conduct.

We have already noticed, that language may sometimes be used injurious to a brother's character, in a great measure through inadvertency, where there was no deliberate bad design. In such a case, I have known persons apt to be offended at being reproved for such language, merely because they were conscious of no evil intention. This, however, was highly unreasonable. Actions must be judged of by their obvious nature and tendency, and not merely by the alleged design of the agent. Here the want of bad intention does not prevent a brother's character from being injured. While the offender then should, in such a case, acknowledge the offence, and be led afterwards to greater caution, the offended ought, with equal readiness, to accept the acknowledgment, and, as there are degrees in criminality, he should not impute to a bad design what can possibly be accounted for on the principle of mere inadvertency. In this way we discover the influence of that "charity, which *thinketh* no evil."

CHAPTER II.

PROFESSEDLY LAMENTING OVER THE IMPERFECTIONS OF OTHERS, ONE WAY OF INDULGING A TATTLING DISPOSITION.

EXPRESSIONS of deep regret over the imperfections of others, is one of the many plausible forms in which, through the extreme deceitfulness of the human heart, a very improper spirit is frequently indulged. Lamentations of this kind usually proceed upon an implied contrast between the imperfections of the person whose character is the subject of them, and our own superiority, in being free from evils we can so clearly discern in another. In this way, self-complacency is secretly gratified, while something is brought before the mind which tends rather to diminish that affection and respect we ought to feel for our brother, than to cherish it. Nay, the evil does not always stop here. It frequently happens, that the imprudence of those to whom such lamentations are expressed, leads them to talk of the subject to others. Through these, again, the language thus used comes to the ears of the person to whom such animadversions relate, and thus a foundation is laid for secret animosity, if not for an open rupture.

Before any one thus indulges himself in expressions of regret before others, on account of the real or supposed imperfections of any of his brethren, he

should ask himself the following questions. Have I, with the fidelity of Christian friendship, pointed out to my brother, wherein I think the leading defect in his character consists? If I have had an opportunity of doing this, and neglected it, am I not criminal? May I not mistake with regard to the fact on which my allegation rests; or, if there is some foundation for it, may it not be greatly exaggerated? Again: admitting that the evil I profess to lament exists in all its supposed extent, will my mentioning it to others do any good? or, may it not be productive of the very opposite effect? If such questions were proposed, and the proper answers to them fairly weighed, we believe they would tend greatly to check that tattling disposition, which is often indulged under this imposing form of regret, for the defects that appear in the character of those around us.

The only ground that seems at all defensible on which such defects can be mentioned to others, is, when it is done with the view that one more likely to succeed than ourselves, may employ his influence in correcting them. Here, however, it must be recollected, that whatever may be done in other cases, if we be in the same Christian society with the person in whom we see such imperfections, we are on no account allowed to mention them to others, till we have first done so to himself. But even where this is not the case, and where we may judge it proper to notice what is wrong in the character of one not in the same church with us to a person who may be likely to succeed in correcting it, we have much need to do it with a proper temper, guarding

against a spirit of self-complacency on account of our own imagined superiority, and being solely animated by a desire for the good of the party concerned. It is surely a fair question here, and every one implicated should be concerned to answer it: Can our lamentations be very deep or sincere on such occasions, if what gives rise to them has never been the subject of prayer before God? This test, if fairly applied, will, we believe, put to shame and to silence many of those gossiping expressions of regret to which we have alluded.

CHAPTER III.

THE EXTENT OF THE CHRISTIAN PRECEPTS RESPECTING EVIL SPEAKING.

“SPEAK evil of *no man*,” says Paul. “Laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and *all evil speakings*,” says Peter. How little are these precepts regarded? Nay, are not all, in one degree or another, chargeable with the violation of them? Do they not imply that we are to avoid not only saying any thing falsely, which is to the discredit of any man, but even saying what we know to be true, unless some good is likely to be attained by it?

But it may be asked, Are there no exceptions—no cases in which it is not only lawful, but proper, to

say what we know of the character of an individual, though it be manifestly to his disadvantage? Yes; we reply, the same law of love to our neighbour, on which the general admonition is founded, requires, in the following instances, a deviation from it. If a church or a friend is apt to be deceived by one whom we have reason to consider a false professor, or if one is in danger of being injured in the business of life, by ignorantly reposing confidence in a person who does not deserve it, whether he professes Christianity or not; it is necessary for us, in these cases, to declare what we know to be true in regard to his character, though it should be to his disadvantage. But all speaking evil of any man in common conversation, or the indulgence of a vein of satire for a little amusement, availing ourselves of a person's peculiarity in appearance or manner to play upon him, or *quiz* him, as it is called, for our own entertainment, or that of others, though it cannot be called directly evil speaking, seems a plain violation of the spirit of this precept.

CHAPTER IV.

BE SLOW TO SPEAK.

IN no case is a regard to this admonition more necessary, than when any occurrence happens, that is calculated to inflame. A rash and hasty expres-

sion, dropped on such an occasion, has often proved the cause of much uneasiness, both to the person who used it, and to others. Sometimes a strong assertion, respecting what a man is determined to do, places him under a powerful temptation, from a regard to consistency, to do what he afterwards sees to be wrong. It is true, where a man has thus expressed himself rashly, it is plainly his duty, and much to his credit, in his cooler moments, to recal the expression; to acknowledge that it was uttered under the impulse of irritation, and to act, however inconsistent it may be with his foolish language, according to the dictates of the word of God. Wherever a man is living under the influence of Christian principles, he will do this. But it is an important prayer, "Lead us not into temptation;" and avoiding occasions of temptation ought certainly to be, on our part, a subject of much watchfulness. The language, however, used in such a case as that referred to, puts a man under a dangerous temptation to indulge an improper spirit; according to the common expression, to be as good as his word, (however inconsistent it be with his cooler judgment,) in order to avoid the reproach of rashness, folly, or indetermination, to which he imagines he would otherwise be exposed.

When a man professing godliness has fallen into this snare, it is a pleasing proof of the influence of Christianity over his mind, and that he is truly humbled on account of his conduct, when he is willing that his folly should not be concealed, that others may learn, from his example, the guard they ought to place over their temper and language.

However humiliating this may be, it is a sort of compensation he owes to his brethren, when, by betraying such an improper temper, he has given them just ground of offence. But the following example will best illustrate what we here have in view.

I lately heard of a member of a church, who, in a rash moment, had declared at one of their meetings, that he would never witness the conduct of the church, if they took a certain step which was then in agitation.* He afterwards, however, had reason to change his sentiments on the point in question. But when the measure referred to was put in execution, he was purposely absent, alleging, as his reason, to one who afterwards inquired, that in this way he avoided the charge of inconsistency. Now this was a mixture of pride and obstinacy. How much better would it have been, had he fairly come forward, and candidly acknowledged, that he had expressed himself rashly, but now saw reason to alter his opinion. Such a step might have been useful to himself. It would indeed have been humbling; but it is this very circumstance that would have made it useful, for we generally remember best, that from which we feel most. His example, in this way, would also have been calculated to be beneficial to others. It would have furnished them with a warning to guard against similar rashness, when they saw the disagreeable situation to which in consequence of it, a man was reduced.

* It is proper to notice here, that the church referred to was at this time destitute of a pastor, and their meetings of course did not partake of that regularity and decorum, which will always be produced where pastoral authority is properly employed, in ruling among those who are in subjection to the law of Christ.

In connexion with the above remarks, we may add, that wherever any one has thus committed himself, by unguarded language, if he afterwards seem sensible of it, it ought to be completely forgotten; if he is not, it ought to be the subject of serious Christian admonition. On no account ought it ever to be made matter of jest or reproach. This would indicate a most improper disposition, instead of manifesting (what every Christian ought to feel,) regret that one who professed to believe the Gospel, had betrayed a spirit so inconsistent with it. It would be criminally adding strength to the temptation under which he had laid himself, to follow out his foolish resolution, or to adhere to his unguarded expression, whatever should be the consequence. It would be quite inconsistent with the apostolic precept, "to restore a brother, who had been overtaken in a fault, in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted." In such a case, where a man is brought to see his criminality, Christian love will gladly draw a veil over the language of rashness and irritation, and bury it in oblivion forever.

CHAPTER V.

IMPRUDENT CHARACTERS IN A CHURCH TEND MUCH
TO PERPLEX IT, AND DISTURB ITS COMFORT.

I HAVE known characters, who, from a foolish and unguarded way of speaking, are perpetually falling into blunders, and offending their brethren. They readily confess, indeed, that they are wrong, when they see the bad effects of their rashness; but there is little or no amendment, and they as readily fall again into the same transgression. Such characters forcibly remind us of the language of the Apostle James: "The tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison," James 3:8.

In persons, too, of this description, we often find such favourable appearances, as tend greatly to counterbalance their prevailing defect. Besides, their offence is not of that gross kind, that can with propriety warrant exclusion. Such characters are sometimes apt to plead, that they mean no harm. But they ought to recollect, that when they see the evil produced by their conduct, and are fairly warned of it, they are answerable for that evil, whether they foresaw and intended it or not.

Let persons of this description seriously consider the declaration of the Spirit of God, James 1:23: "If any man among you seem to be religious, and *bridleth not his tongue*, that man's religion is vain."

The brethren connected with such characters may often be perplexed what to do ; and as such conduct, when persisted in, is exceedingly apt to irritate, it will be extremely necessary to keep in view our Lord's language, Matt. 18:23. When he was asked by Peter how often his brother might sin against him, and he forgive him, till seven times ; his reply was, "I say not unto thee, until seven times, but, until seventy times seven." In the case proposed by Peter, indeed, as well as that stated in the parable that follows, a profession of repentance is plainly supposed. But the difficulty that occurs in the case we are considering, is, that though there is such a profession, there is not that evidence that could be wished of its sincerity, by abstaining from a similar offence in future. The whole tenour of the New Testament, however, seems to indicate, that we are in much greater danger of not extending our forgiveness far enough, than of falling into the opposite extreme, by giving it too wide a range. Indeed, as we have had occasion to observe, under a former article, it seems impossible to exceed here, if we avoid the charge of winking at iniquity.

Where such uncomely conduct is to be found in a member of a church, it is very necessary to check the irritation it is apt to excite, by keeping in view every favourable feature, that may be associated in the same character, with that rashness and imprudence that is so censurable. Above all, serious and affectionate admonition ought not to be spared ; and wherever any one is in subjection to the law of Christ, this may certainly be expected in time to counteract the most powerful natural propensity.

CHAPTER VI.

OF SPEAKING UNGUARDEDLY OF OTHER SECTS.

“LET your speech,” says an Apostle, “be always with grace.” Does it not too often happen, that much conversation is employed in descanting on the defects of those of other parties; sometimes, perhaps, mentioning their follies, or even their gross iniquities, rather as subjects of ridicule, than as matter of grief? Are not these things sometimes dwelt upon, even in the tone of triumph, and in the spirit of secret self-complacency, instead of that of real regret? In such a case, if we consider the persons we speak of as Christians, and chargeable with great inconsistencies, an Apostle would have viewed this as a subject of serious lamentation; and it is surely no less so, if they be viewed as ungodly men, making a profession of religion from worldly motives; thus not only ruining their own souls, but, if professed teachers, contributing to deceive and ruin the souls of others.

This remark is applicable, not to one party or another exclusively, but more or less to all. There cannot be a more gross or unhappy mistake than where strictures of this nature pass for religious conversation. It must be very obvious to every reflecting mind, that it does not require the smallest portion of genuine Christianity, either to engage in such conversation, or to relish it. Nay, what it

tends to gratify is a spirit very different from the spirit of the Gospel. If we sincerely regret the defects with which others are chargeable, if we consider them Christians, and have access to them, let friendly admonition and expostulation be employed. If, on the other hand, we either cannot address them as Christians, or find, from their situation, they are quite inaccessible to us, the most effectual way of endeavouring to do them good, is, by exhibiting, in our own character, a bright example of practical godliness.

The observation, though trite, is certainly just, that the world is governed by names, and many Christians are too much under the same kind of influence. We ought to guard against taking up prejudices against an unknown character, merely from the name of the sect with which he is connected. This often arises from not distinguishing between the portion of truth that is found in a particular system, and in the profession of which all the members of a particular sect are united; and the errors into which many of those who avowedly hold that system may have fallen. Perhaps these errors do not fairly flow from the system in question, and of course they are not imputable to such persons as profess to hold it; nor can they be considered as at all countenancing them. In one point of view, indeed, such may be blameworthy, and that is in not separating from those who have departed from the professed bond of their union. But let not an indefinite charge in this case be preferred. Let the blame imputed be confined to that in which the criminality strictly consists.

Have we not, however, often seen cases in which certain pernicious consequences appeared to flow from particular principles, while those who held them could not perceive, that such consequences really followed, and were as ready as any to disclaim them? I am far from supposing that error is innocent, or that false principles, whether all their consequences be discerned or not, do not, in the natural course of their operation, lead to what is wrong in practice. But it ought to be remembered, that there are at least shades of criminality; and what I would remonstrate against here, is, the tendency which some have, whenever they hear mentioned the name of the sect with which a person is connected, at once to indulge the most determined prejudice against him, and to involve all who bear that particular name, in one indiscriminate and unqualified censure.

Prejudices of this kind often arise from education; from being accustomed to hear, in early life, what is to the disadvantage of a particular sect; from being much in the company of those who misrepresent their principles, or ascribe their conduct to false motives, or who perhaps are accustomed to amuse themselves and others, by collecting and retailing ludicrous anecdotes about a few individuals of a particular party, and thus endeavour to transfer what is either wicked or foolish in their character,—or in the character of those who once belonged to the society, but were afterwards put away,—to the general body. Sometimes these prejudices arise from a person having met, either in the circle of his own acquaintance, or in the course of business, with

some belonging to a particular denomination, who acted very improperly. This begat an early prejudice against the very name of the sect with which such individuals were connected, and all who bore it were denounced with these offenders.

Now, a very little reflection must show every one, that such a method of judging is exceedingly apt to lead us to false conclusions; and that no one can be expected to judge with any tolerable measure of accuracy, who allows his mind to be warped by such prejudices. Only observe how far this method of estimating the character of any system may go; nay, how far it has gone, in condemning the very name of Christianity itself. The well-known story of the Inca of Peru, who declined the instruction of the Spanish priests, mentioning as his reason, that he had no desire to go to heaven, if he was likely to meet with any Spaniards there, shows how far the most unjust prejudice may be excited against a particular creed, by men assuming a name who have no legitimate claim to it. In like manner, it is well known what powerful prejudices have, in many other heathen countries, been produced against the very name of Christianity, by the characters of those who bore it exhibiting in every respect the very opposite of what such an appellation should have described. Every one, however, must allow, that such prejudices, so far as they regarded Christianity itself, were most unreasonable and unfounded.

We ought then to take into view, how much men are the creatures of education, of habit, of external situations; of the particular incidents that have occurred in their history, which were not at their

own disposal, but regulated by a higher hand: and though we are not to disguise our sentiments, or think less of the evil of error whoever holds it, let not prejudice against a name, or even just disapprobation of a general system, obscure in our view the divine lustre of the image of Jesus, in whatever denomination of professing Christians, and in whatever degree it appears.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE UNQUALIFIED ABUSE OF WRITERS WHOSE SENTIMENTS ARE PARTIALLY INCORRECT.

SOMEWHAT allied to the remarks contained in the preceding article, is that unlimited abuse which we often hear poured on writers, who, though they seem to have just views of the leading doctrines of divine truth, have expressed themselves on some points in language not quite defensible. Nothing is more calculated to excite disgust than to hear men who, while they manifestly lived under the practical influence of the Gospel, are allowed to have entertained sentiments in a certain degree inaccurate, and perhaps to have used expressions still more so, treated with hostility and contempt. Error ought not to excite contempt, but regret. It ought also to be constantly recollected, that the language of one system can be learned as easily as that of another; and that expressions, the most correct and scriptural, may be employed by persons who are strangers to

vital godliness. There is surely, too, a great inconsistency in hearing men sneering at those denominated popular writers, in the most unqualified manner, and representing their books as highly pernicious, on account of particular inaccuracies, while they would confess they reaped advantage from the writings of Socinians and others, whose errors were of the first magnitude.

I would not, however, be understood by this to defend expressions which do not clearly convey scriptural views of divine truth, far less to plead in behalf of any sentiment which, upon the closest examination, does not accord with the unerring standard. No! let our sentiments and language be as much purified as possible, from every thing either directly false, or in any measure inaccurate. But the recollection of the deep deceitfulness of the heart, and of the possibility of employing even the most correct form of sound words, when men are destitute of the faith of the Gospel, ought certainly instead of leading us to treat others with contempt, to inspire deep humility, and habitual watchfulness.

These remarks will equally apply to living characters, and to those who, though dead, yet live in their writings. We shall often find, that we may learn much from those whose language on some points we cannot approve, or whose *situations* we cannot see to be consistent with the word of God. Let us learn to take useful hints from whatever quarter; and while we are called earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, let it ever be done not in the tone of ridicule and contempt, but in meekness of wisdom.

CHAPTER VIII.

EVIL-SPEAKING COMPATIBLE, IN A CERTAIN
DEGREE, WITH SPEAKING THE TRUTH.

IN many cases, evil-speaking will be found quite compatible with speaking the truth to a certain extent. Thus, if I mention what is calculated to injure another, I may say nothing but the truth, so far as I go ; but I may suppress, or not bring forward in its proper connexion, something that materially affects the sentiment or conduct ascribed to the person who is the subject of my animadversions.

In this way, the sentiments expressed in public discourses are often grossly misrepresented by those who retail what they hear, either neglecting to observe, or omitting to mention the connexion in which a particular sentiment is introduced. The following example may be selected as an illustration of this remark. It is not long since a friend of mine heard it roundly asserted in a sermon, that it was the express duty of every one to partake of the Lord's Supper. Such an assertion in this insulated form, might at first appear a little doubtful, or to indicate, in the person who made it, very loose notions of the sacred nature of that ordinance. But the connexion in which it was introduced, removed every difficulty. It was the object of the preacher to show, that what was the duty of one man was the duty of all. But

that there was a certain order in which these duties were to be observed. Thus it is the duty of all to remember the dying love of Christ at his table. But it is a duty necessarily previous to this, their believing the testimony of God concerning his Son. To have spoken of the preacher, then, as maintaining the proposition above mentioned, would have been nothing more than the truth. But it is obvious, that, had nothing more been stated, a very material circumstance would have been kept back, which gave the sentiment expressed a very different aspect from what it would have had, if mentioned as detached from the train of thought with which it was connected.

This may be considered as a strong illustration. But it bears but too striking a resemblance to many cases that daily occur, in which, from the influence of prejudice or party spirit, the conduct or the language, both in private conversation and in public address, of one class, is grossly misrepresented by another. That man must have a very lax conscience, indeed, who can content himself with merely telling the truth, so far as he goes, while, in speaking of the sentiments or conduct, even of those who most decidedly differ from him, he can intentionally conceal, or place in a false light, any circumstance which tends to give a just representation of them. This is an obvious violation of the royal law of love, and is manifestly inconsistent with that simplicity, and godly sincerity, in which every Christian ought to have his conversation in the world.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME CASES IN WHICH MEN ARE APT TO JUDGE
RASHLY AND INACCURATELY OF OTHERS.

IN judging of the conduct of one who professes to be a follower of the Lord Jesus, and whose conduct is upon the whole consistent with his profession, it is necessary to take into the account, both the particular method he may have seen it fit to adopt in observing a particular duty, and what may be peculiar in the circumstances in which he may be placed. Suppose, for example, a man's principles lead him to give what property he has to spare for benevolent designs, in *one particular channel*, and that he has devoted a certain portion of his income to be employed in that way : Some, perhaps, may allege it is improper to adopt any exclusive plan of this kind, which leaves no room for particular emergencies ; but such a plan as that supposed in the case before us, may not only be upon the whole most unexceptionable, but formed after the most deliberate and conscientious inquiry. What he gives, he gives by rule. You come, perhaps, and expect aid in a case to which this rule does not extend, or when the sum he has devoted to such purposes (and which, if you knew its extent, you would think a very adequate one,) is exhausted. You are disappointed, where you entertained the most sanguine expectations,

and are apt to form the most harsh conclusions; nay, perhaps in the moment of disappointment, to indulge in the most unguarded expressions respecting his character. In such a case, it is extremely necessary to guard against judging rashly. If you knew every thing that was necessary to qualify you for judging with propriety, you might be constrained to approve, or even to admire, where you are so much disposed to condemn.

Again: a rash judgment is often formed, from not taking into view, those habits which a man's situation rendered necessary at one period of his life, though a subsequent change of circumstances should make a continuance in them neither necessary nor proper. Suppose a man in early life has been under the necessity of attending to trifles in the way of expending his property; if he should afterwards receive a large fortune, the same propensity will sometimes appear. It is a part of his confirmed habits, though upon principle he should expend what he possesses, in the most suitable and liberal manner. "Charity thinketh no evil." When judging of a Christian brother, it endeavours to put the most favourable construction upon every part of his deportment that it will admit, and guards against imputing to improper motives, any thing that may appear doubtful, merely from ignorance of what, in a particular case, may influence his conduct.

When our Lord sent out disciples during his personal ministry, he told them, "Into whatever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and there abide till ye go thence." Matt. 10:11. Besides what might be derived from other considera-

tions, much of the divine wisdom appears in this regulation, from the strong propensity men have to judge of the character of others by their company. The disciples had a message to deliver, which was far from congenial with the feelings and prejudices of those they addressed. They were, therefore, carefully to avoid any adventitious obstacle that might hinder its reception. Christians are certainly called to act upon the same principle, in every age, and to add nothing unnecessarily to the offence of the cross of Christ.

In forming an opinion of others, however, much caution is often requisite, in applying the maxim, that we may safely judge of a man's character from the company in which he is found. This is particularly the case, where a person is unavoidably ignorant of the character of those with whom, for a time, he may associate. Thus, for example, when a stranger comes to a place for a few days, he is introduced perhaps, by some of his friends, to one whose character is very different from his own. With such a one he must, for the time, hold intercourse. He may have no access to know any thing particularly about this person's conduct, and besides, he is acquainted with none else. Now, nothing would surely be more unreasonable, than to form an opinion, in such a case, of a man's character, from the society in which he is thus accidentally found.

Again: we well know it was one of the objections that the Pharisees brought against our Lord, that he ate with publicans and sinners. Before we judge of others, from the company in which they may be seen, it is necessary to know whether their associat-

ing with such individuals arises from a similarity of disposition, and a relish for their conversation, or from a desire to do them good. It was plainly with this last view, that our Lord was found in such society; and it seems impossible exactly to say how far his disciples may go in this respect, in imitating his example. But if no precise line can be pointed out here, Christians ought to be very cautious in judging of one another. It is a case in which every man must be persuaded in his own mind, and perhaps the same rule is not applicable to every individual. The prevailing propensities, and the peculiar gifts of Christians, are very different. One man, for example, finds a fondness for company his besetting sin; he is naturally of a social turn, and in an unguarded hour he is apt to be led astray. The habits of another are so opposite, that it is a burden to him to go into society, even where he is convinced that duty calls him. Again: one man has the talent of introducing what is useful in conversation, and thus giving his intercourse with others an improving turn. Another is so destitute of this talent, and any attempt he makes in this way is done in so blundering a manner, that he is quite sensible he is in danger of injuring the cause he would wish to promote.

We would caution Christians, then, against judging of others, because they may see them going into situations which they themselves are conscious they could not occupy with any prospect of usefulness to others, while they might prove to themselves materially injurious. Let none rashly judge, that a Christian, in such a case, is becoming conformed to the world, unless other parts of his conduct tend to

establish such a charge. Separation from the world does not require keeping at a distance from worldly men, when we can do them good. We ought to feel tender compassion for those who are out of the right way, and to use every legitimate kind of influence to lead them into it.

It is at the same time necessary here also to hint, that while Christians associate with careless and worldly characters, particularly when such persons have any thing captivating in their manners, they ought ever to consider it as a post of danger. They need much watchfulness and circumspection, lest they should receive injury to themselves by insensibly imitating the spirit of the world; or lest they do harm to others by appearing to countenance what is false in principle or improper in conduct; or lest they allow to pass, unimproved, an opportunity of introducing what is fitted to do good. Indeed, we believe it usually will be found, that it is impossible to be sufficiently faithful and circumspect, in the company of worldly persons, without our invitations to it being considerably abridged, unless where family connexions render such intercourse necessary.

To the attention of such Christians as, from their connexions, are called more than others into the company of those who are strangers to the influence of Christian principle, or who, from the hope of being useful, may be disposed to go; we beg leave to recommend the salutary lesson suggested by the history of the missions undertaken by some of the ancient Jesuits. Many of that society went to distant lands, apparently full of zeal, for the conversion of the heathen. It was found, however, by those

who afterwards visited them, that the conversion was on the wrong side ; that they showed such a disposition to accommodate to the heathen, that they might rather have been said to go over to their idolatries, than to have converted the heathen to the religion of Christ.

On this part of the subject we only farther remark, that family connexions may require some to be much more than others in the company of worldly and irreligious characters. This ought ever to be taken into account ; and the greater caution is requisite, in forming an opinion of any one on this ground, because the calls to intercourse of this nature are generally such, that a stranger is in a great measure incapable of judging of them.

Another source from which false views of the characters of others are apt to be formed, consists in not attending to the difference, in natural temper, among professing Christians. If one, for example, has few or no religious acquaintances, this will be viewed by many as an argument against him. In judging in such a case, however, various circumstances ought to be taken into the account. Some are naturally shy and reserved in their manner with every person ; and it is not to be expected that Christianity will altogether overcome this natural cast of the mind. Our judgment of a character, in such circumstance, where such a natural temper evidently prevails, ought certainly to be very different from what we would be authorized to form, if a person seemed very frank and communicative with the careless and ungodly, while he was disposed to keep at a distance from his Christian brethren.

There would be plainly, in this last case, something very much calculated to excite suspicion, or rather something plainly indicating a want of relish for that society, which every genuine Christian will chiefly value.

Where young persons, who seem in the way of inquiry, are but little acquainted with Christians in their neighbourhood, it sometimes happens that the latter are more to blame than the former. There must be a defect in that zeal for the divine glory, and compassion for the souls of men, which ought to animate the breast of every disciple of Jesus, if we do not mark, with peculiar delight, any symptom of a neighbour beginning to attend to the things that belong to his peace, and if we do not gladly embrace every opportunity of encouraging and cherishing it. Those who are beginning to inquire, naturally expect that the first approaches should be made by those who have more knowledge and experience than themselves; and it is much to be regretted, if they are disappointed, by not finding a readiness in Christians to give them all the encouragement and assistance in their power.

In judging of a person's Christian profession, by his disposition to cultivate religious intercourse, it ought farther to be recollected, that a variety of circumstances may have contributed to give him a particular bias on this subject. We all know the strength of early impressions. A man's lot may have been cast, in early life, in the society of those, the whole of whose religion consisted in talking about it, while their temper and conduct manifested they were strangers to genuine Christianity. This,

we believe, has often excited a disgust at such conversation, unless there was a particular acquaintance with the characters of those who were engaged in it, which even the maturer judgment of advanced years could not altogether remove.

Again: how often has it happened, that the unfortunate selection of the individual, to whom a man first unbosomed himself, in communicating his impressions of divine truth, has produced an effect most permanently unfavourable! At the period when the mind was peculiarly susceptible, and big with the immense importance of the subject on which it had long brooded in secret, gladly hailed an opportunity of unburdening itself to one in whom it thought it could repose the most unbounded confidence; that confidence was, perhaps, through thoughtlessness or indifference, either imprudently abused, or coldly repelled. It is impossible to describe the effects which, at this impressible period, one such incident may produce on the future character. It may create a degree of shyness and reserve, which the subsequent experience of years cannot entirely obliterate. We need hardly add, that, in judging of a person's disposition for Christian intercourse, his external situation, his particular avocations in life, along with the time he may have at his own disposal, and various similar circumstances, ought ever to be taken into view.

But, it is not only when we have to do with the shy and reserved, that we are liable to mistake the real character; this also frequently happens where we meet with persons of the very opposite temper. Thus, the warmth of a man's natural disposition, a

natural taste for bustle and activity, has often been mistaken, both by himself and others, for a zeal for the truth. Such cases may generally be discovered, by a very obvious deficiency, in two of the leading features of the Christian character, *meekness* and *humility*. Nay, it will be well if these graces be not in some measure treated with contempt. It ought, however, to be constantly recollected, that they are not only indissolubly associated with that zeal which Paul approved and exemplified; but that they held a most conspicuous place in the character of a greater than Paul, in that of his divine Master and Lord. Taking him as a model, we must, "in all lowliness of mind, esteem others better than ourselves," and "in meekness instruct those that oppose themselves." As these are essentially necessary signatures of true Christian zeal, we are sure, that whatever a man may profess, where they are wanting, it is a counterfeit; it is something totally different that assumes the name.

CHAPTER X.

THE NECESSITY OF CAUTION IN RECEIVING INFORMATION RESPECTING OTHER SECTS, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES FROM THEIR OPPONENTS.

WE ought to be very careful how we receive reports respecting other sects of professing Christians. I recollect a person of considerable observa-

tion and experience, remarking, that the more he knew of the world, the more he was impressed with the truth of that Scripture, that, in a certain sense, all men are liars; and, indeed, the more we know of the world, the more shall we be convinced, how much misrepresentation abounds in it. Any one, then, who would wish to judge correctly respecting the sentiments of another party, or even respecting the incidents that are said to have happened among them, ought not to derive his information from those who differ from them, but to go to the fountain head to receive the statement of their sentiments, or the explanation of any part of their conduct, from themselves.

Every Christian ought to be ready to explain any thing in his principles or practice, which is liable to misrepresentation, and respecting which others may be disposed to inquire. I make this remark, because I have known some Christians who seem to think, that it is quite enough that they are satisfied in their own minds that their principles and conduct are agreeable to the word of God, and that it is a laudable mark of superiority to the opinion of the world to be at least quite indifferent to any inquiries that may be made, if not directly to decline any explanation. Now, this is a sentiment which I conceive to be extremely incorrect. I do not say that such explanation should be obtruded, when unasked, on the attention of others; but if we are called to "be always ready to give an answer to every one that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear," 1 Peter 3:15, we should, in like manner, have a reason to give for any part of

our principles or conduct, which we consider as forming a branch of Christian faith or obedience. This is what we owe to ourselves, to others, and to the cause of truth. Character is an instrument of usefulness, and we are not authorized to be indifferent to it, or to forfeit it, if any candid explanation can prevent us from doing so. Such explanation seems plainly required by the precept, "Let not your good be evil spoken of." In this way, too, we may avoid throwing a stumbling-block in the way of others, and prevent the cause of truth from receiving an injury it might otherwise sustain. If at any time we have acted improperly, (as all are liable to err,) we ought willingly to acknowledge it, that the evil effects of our improprieties may be as limited as possible, by our doing what we can to remove the offence others may have received from our sinful and unguarded conduct. If our sentiments, then, are misrepresented, let us candidly explain what they really are. If any part of our conduct is so, let us state the fact simply as it stands, that those who are willing to lay aside prejudice may have an opportunity of getting it removed.

But does it not often happen, that men are apt to become irritated when any inquiry is made into some parts, either of their principles or practice? Wherever this is the case, it furnishes a strong presumption that there is something wrong. The following anecdote, told of Dr. Swift, contains a very just remark on human nature. When arguing, one day, with great coolness, with a gentleman, who had become exceedingly warm in the dispute, one of the company asked him, how he could keep

his temper so well? "The reason is," replied the Dean, "I have truth on my side." It is certain, that a man is chiefly apt to lose his temper when questioned on a subject respecting which he can give no very satisfactory explanation.

While, then, it appears the plain duty of Christians to be ready to give an account of any part of their principles or practice, to those who may ask it, it is manifestly criminal, on the other hand, in any man, to harbour prejudices against others, from general surmises, which may be totally unfounded, if it is in his power, by personal inquiry, to obtain more correct information. Those who, amidst all the collisions of interest, and jarrings of sentiment which exist in this world of selfishness and error, are disposed to act with fairness, and to do to others as they would that others should do to them, ought to unite as a phalanx against the whole tribe of calumniators and detractors, under whatever form they may appear.

An attention to the hints above suggested would manifestly tend to remove much of that prejudice that so much abounds. But, alas! are there not cases, in which men are *willingly ignorant* of what may be said in vindication of those who differ from them? They not only deliberately indulge prejudice and misrepresentation themselves, but manifest a secret gratification in the diffusion of them among others. Wherever this exists, whatever a man may profess, and however dangerous he may conceive to be the errors of those he opposes, he is not opposing them in the spirit of the Gospel. Let error, of whatever description, be met with the legitimate

weapons of argument and truth. But let not the Christian soldier ever resort to the armoury of the prince of darkness, and employ weapons derived from that quarter, to defend the kingdom of light. Such a conduct will not stand the test of the day of trial.

As one illustration, among many, of the misrepresentations that often take place, in regard to the conduct of Christian churches, I may here mention the false stories that are often in circulation, respecting the grounds on which persons are excluded from them. There are evidently two cases mentioned in Scripture, where exclusion becomes necessary. The first is that of a wicked person, or one found chargeable with gross transgression. As the conduct of such a one is so decidedly hostile to his own best interests, and calculated to bring much reproach on the Christian profession, a church is called to show that they will not bear them that are evil, by immediate exclusion, though, upon satisfactory evidence of repentance, the offender should afterwards be restored. This was the case with the incestuous person in the church at Corinth, of whom we have an account, 1 Cor. 5. The other case that requires exclusion, is when a person will not hear the church. This point is established by our Lord, Matt. 18:16. Whatever the original offence may have been, though it should be something of a comparatively inferior nature, after the previous steps there mentioned are taken without success, it becomes necessary to lay it before the church. Here the offender is unquestionably bound to hear the

church; and if he do not, it is impossible for him to remain longer in the communion.

Where a member is excluded on this last account, how often is it circulated that the original private offence was the ground of separation. And if this was something comparatively trivial, it is naturally thought a very strange thing, that a church should exclude a member for such a cause. In such a case, however, and indeed we may add in many others, exclusion is founded, not on the original offence, but on that which it was the means of bringing to light. In pursuing the plain rule of Scripture, the offender, instead of manifesting the spirit of the Gospel, discovers pride and obstinacy. The application of the laws of Christ makes manifest what was not known before. They, like every other part of his word, tend to search the hearts of the children of men. When at last the offender peremptorily refuses to hear the church, it is on this account, and on this alone, exclusion takes place. The wisdom of this regulation is sufficiently obvious. Pertinaciously indulging a spirit of pride and obstinacy, is as really inconsistent with Christianity, as open iniquity. But the laws of Christ are so graciously constituted, that while his disciples receive from the observance of them all the benefit that can be derived from association, they are also carefully guarded against injuring one another, by administering to the self-deception of any. While, by indulging such a spirit, then, a man manifests a departure from Christian obedience, the mutual confidence and union between him and his brethren are destroyed, and separation is what the benefit of both parties imperiously demands.

PART THIRD.

RESPECTING PASTORS AND TEACHERS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

IN introducing this chapter, it may be useful to state what is meant by the distinction between pastors and teachers,* and to inquire, how far there is any foundation for it in the word of God. We shall be naturally led to this inquiry, by considering what appears to have been the method, in the apostolic times, of supplying churches with pastors.

In the inspired writings, we have the following directions given, respecting the qualifications necessary for the pastoral office. 1 Tim. 3:2. "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt [qualified] to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, [or *not one who earns money by base means*]; and by this translation is this part of the description distinguish-

* In the following observations, I shall substitute the name *Preacher* for *Teacher*; as being the name now more commonly in use, while the same class is denoted by it.

ed from *covetous*, which follows ;] but patient, not a brawler, not covetous, one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity. (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God ?) Not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be of good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

Again: Titus 1:7. "For a bishop* must be blameless, as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre ; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate. Holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." On these passages, we suggest the following remarks :

I. It appears from them, that the brethren, on some occasions at least, when they met together, were accustomed to exercise their gifts for mutual edification. This is manifest, from one of the qualifications mentioned—a fitness to teach. Now, how could it be ascertained, whether or not any one

* It has often been justly observed how clearly it appears from this passage in Titus, that the terms Elder and Bishop are employed in Scripture as of the same import. The whole passage runs thus: Verse 5, "for this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless," &c. Here, it is plain, there would be no legitimacy in the Apostle's inference, unless elder and bishop were used as perfectly synonymous terms. Titus was to ordain elders, if any were blameless. "For a bishop must be blameless," &c.

possessed this qualification unless he had made the trial? Surely, the members of a church could with no propriety invite any one to the pastoral office, unless they had satisfactory evidence of his possessing this part of the character, as well as every other. But this could only be known from his exercising his gifts among them in a church capacity. I say, in a church capacity; for we have known persons who, in private conversation, could express themselves with the greatest propriety, who from timidity, or some other cause, were quite incapable of speaking in public, and therefore were not qualified for the discharge of those duties which the situation of pastor required.

The subject of promiscuous exhortation in churches, has been, with some, much discussed of late years, and it does appear to me one which is by no means destitute of difficulty. This difficulty greatly arises from the profusion of gifts bestowed in the apostolic age, and consequently the different circumstances in which churches are now found. That this practice is liable to abuse, and that it actually often is abused, cannot be denied. This is certainly the case when the time of a church is occupied by hearing an address which is not calculated to edify. But is not public, professional teaching often abused in the same way? Still, however, it appears very desirable at least, on the grounds above stated, that a church should have some opportunities of ascertaining, by any one being permitted to exhort, the existence of such gifts as may be possessed by any of its members.

The extent to which this practice may be carried

in particular churches, may certainly vary, according to the number of members who may possess gifts for usefulness, and ought to be regulated by this and similar circumstances, if we are guided by that general precept, that "all things ought to be done to the use of edifying." Under the influence of this principle, I cannot but consider it of great importance, that at those stated seasons when strangers are disposed to attend the worship of God, none be employed in public address, who are in danger of exciting their disgust, and thus driving them away altogether from the means of instruction. Let no one say this is the language of carnal policy. No; it is a legitimate inference from the precept above mentioned. On the same ground on which Paul himself, or Apollos, addressed the Jews, when he obtained access to them in their synagogues, and would certainly not have called on any one to do so, who was not qualified to give a tolerably accurate view of the Christian doctrine; on the same ground, I say, do we consider it requisite, in the present day, that none should be employed, when the world assemble with Christian churches, who do not possess some corresponding qualifications. It appears a direct violation of the above maxim, to run the risk, on such an occasion, of having divine truth stated in a confused, inaccurate, and blundering manner. If it be said, why run this risk at all? I reply, *1st*, A certain good is attained by a church having some opportunity of discovering any gifts that exist among the members, while these, by exercise, may be improved: *2dly*, Members can bear with inaccuracies in the exhortations of their breth-

ren, and even be edified in spite of these, while they could not hear them without offence in the presence of a promiscuous assembly.

II. The tempers that are necessary to the pastoral office, are not merely those that are requisite to the existence of the Christian character. Had this been the case, the Apostle must be considered as merely saying, that a bishop must be a Christian; a limitation of the import of his language which is quite inadmissible. The description plainly implies, that there may be Christians not possessing these tempers, in that conspicuous degree, at least, requisite to their being elected to the office in question. There may be Christians, for example, who are soon angry; who, though they see the evil of indulging an irritable temper, have not so far subdued it, as that their character accords with the description of the Apostle. In most cases, the formation of the character here mentioned, in all its parts, will be found, perhaps, to consist partly in the cast of the natural temper, while that is improved and meliorated by the influence of divine grace. But, to whatever quarter such a combination of qualities may be traced, it must be found in those, who are properly elected, as pastors of the churches of Christ.

III. From the account here given of the qualifications necessary to the office of pastor, it is plain, that any one called to it must be well known to the church. He must either have resided for a considerable time among them, or at least their acquaintance with his temper and habits, whether it be from personal observation, or the testimony of others, must be perfectly satisfactory. This clearly shows

the impropriety of a church hastily inviting one to be their pastor, who is, in a great measure, a stranger to them, merely from having heard him deliver a few discourses. It is true, a man's fitness to teach may be soon ascertained in this way; but this is only one qualification among many, and though essentially necessary, nay, perhaps the primary one, it is by no means the only one which is requisite. Every one who knows what the pastoral office requires, will be convinced, that being patient, not soon angry, &c. are necessary for the peace and edification of the church, as well as being qualified for public teaching. In whatever way, then, their knowledge is obtained, the members of a church must be satisfied that a person possesses these qualifications, before they can, with propriety, invite him to take the oversight of them in the Lord.

There is one passage of Scripture, however, often quoted on this subject, and which seems to be pushed farther than it will fairly bear: I mean, the language that was addressed by the Apostles to the church at Jerusalem, *when* deacons were first chosen in it. "Look ye out," said the Apostles, "among you, seven men, whom we may appoint over this business," Acts 6:3. This is often quoted, as implying that none can, with propriety, be called to the pastoral office in a church, who were not originally members of the church over which they are to preside. Nothing is more obvious, than that the church at Jerusalem could look nowhere but to some of their own body, to engage in the office of deacons. But we find no such language addressed to churches, in regard to those whom they may choose as pastors.

All that is said on this subject is, that a bishop must possess certain qualifications. If a church is satisfied that a person possesses these, they may, with propriety, invite him, whether he was originally among themselves, or a member of another church.

The evil of thus applying what is said in regard to the choice of deacons in the passage above quoted, is, that it goes upon the supposition, that wherever a few Christians are collected as a church, they must have a pastor from among themselves. Now, it is certainly a fact, that cases often occur, in which those, who are thus collected in a particular place, have not one among them fitted for this office. Such must either then continue destitute of a pastor altogether, or invite one to take the charge of them, who has not the scriptural qualifications for it, or receive one who has these, from some other quarter. If, then, in such a case, one possessed of the qualities requisite in a pastor, were to be sent from another church, to labour among brethren in this situation; and if, after they were satisfied of his fitness for the office, they were to invite him to take the oversight of them, — there seems to me, in such a measure, nothing inconsistent with the word of God; nay, this appears one way, among others, in which the knowledge of the Gospel is likely to be diffused.

It has been already hinted, that the pastors of the early churches seem to have been selected for that office, from their manifestly possessing the various qualifications, which the Apostle represents as requisite for it. But some of these qualifications may exist in characters, where others do not. A man

may be fit to teach, nay, have distinguished gifts in this way, who is so self-willed (*i. e.* dogmatical, — of an unaccommodating disposition, — tenacious in trifles,) as totally to unfit him for ruling in a church. Here, then, a difficulty occurs. Are these gifts for public usefulness to be lost, or are some of the qualifications requisite to the pastoral office to be dispensed with, by electing him to it, though he does not possess them? If all public teaching is to be necessarily confined to pastors, we seem unavoidably involved in a dilemma here.

There is one singular way in which some have interpreted the passages above quoted, respecting the necessary qualifications of bishops, apparently with a view to get rid of this very difficulty. They have alleged, that where there is a plurality of elders, if all the qualifications mentioned be found in the eldership *conjointly*, it is enough. Thus they conceive they might with propriety choose one possessing the other requisites, but not fitted to teach, if they can associate with him one who can teach; though in him, again, the other qualifications should be wanting. Such an interpretation, however, seems very untenable. If we may dispense with one quality, we may dispense with another. The same rule of interpretation that would allow us to choose one not fitted to teach, would allow us to choose one who is soon angry; and surely nothing would be more absurd, than to elect an irascible or dogmatical character, as a ruler in a church of Christ, whatever his gifts for public teaching might be.

This interpretation seems an expedient, intended to get rid of the difficulty above noticed, by open-

ing a field for the exercise of gifts for public usefulness, to those who may possess them. But it is no small confirmation of the view already given of the conduct of the early churches upon this subject, that it secures the end designed to be attained by this expedient, without deviating from the plain rule of the word of God. In them public usefulness was not confined to pastors. Though they appear to have been the stated teachers of the church, if any man had eminent gifts for usefulness, either to the church or the world, they found no difficulty in calling them into exercise. They seem plainly to have acted on the principle of calling forth and giving the most favourable direction, to whatever gifts were possessed by any of their number ; so that the greatest good to the church, and to the world, might be attained.

It is well known to be the practice of some churches, to send out such of their brethren to preach the word, as they consider suitably qualified for the employment, particularly where an opening is found, in which there is a prospect of usefulness. No one, who is not blinded by prejudice, can, I think, with any propriety, object to this. But if a brother, possessing gifts, may be sent to preach occasionally in a place, may not a church, with equal propriety, call on such a one statedly to labour in a field, where there is a probability that his labours may be accompanied with success? When the term *preacher*, then, in the following hints, is used as distinguished from *pastor*, it is to a person of this description, whether engaged statedly or occasionally, that it is applied.

It may occur to some, that an objection of considerable weight lies against the above remarks, from the circumstances of the apostolic churches being in some respects quite peculiar. Miraculous gifts were certainly imparted, at that period, in a very liberal manner, and seem to have been enjoyed by many of the brethren. This is manifest from 1 Cor. 12 and 14 chap. Some appear to me to have grafted inferences on these passages, which, on account of some things in them being altogether peculiar to the apostolic age, they will not fairly bear. This peculiarity, however, does not affect the general principle for which we have been contending, that of calling forth, improving, and giving the most useful direction to whatever gifts (by which I here mean natural talents for usefulness,) any of the members of a church may possess. We find the Apostle, 1 Cor. 14, exhorting the brethren to covet earnestly the best gifts, *i. e.* those that were calculated to improve others; while he pointedly condemns such as seemed disposed, in their public meetings, to exercise those gifts that merely tended to excite admiration, rather than such as were conducive to godly edifying. The advancement of the general good, then, was carefully to be kept in view, even when miraculous gifts were bestowed; and the same general principle seems equally applicable, now that these extraordinary gifts are withdrawn.

Manifold are the happy effects that might result from calling into exercise the various talents for usefulness that may be enjoyed by the individuals connected with Christian churches. I know a member of a church, who set apart an hour or two, one

evening every week, for meeting with ten or a dozen of his poor and ignorant neighbours, with whom he read a portion of Scripture, and endeavoured to lead their attention, in a familiar way, to the plain doctrines of the word of God. Now, let us for a moment suppose every intelligent Christian following such an example, (I speak of those who are well qualified for such a task, and of these there are not a few, in the churches of Christ,) and what an amazing increase would there be to the means of instruction. In a large town, or a populous neighbourhood, how widely might the knowledge of divine truth be thus diffused.

Others are found in churches, who have a particular talent for addressing those in affliction. They have themselves, perhaps, been the children of adversity, the subjects of many family bereavements, or of severe bodily distress. In this way, they can enter into the situations of their afflicted brethren, and can lead them, with a feeling to which others are strangers, to those sources of consolation which their peculiar circumstances require. Ought not such to be much engaged in this service? As members of the body, is not this the office which particularly belongs to them, that the comfort of the rest of the members may be promoted? Nay, may not such be also eminently useful to those that are without? How often are the calls that pastors of churches receive, to visit the sick, especially in large towns, so numerous, that they can attend to them but very imperfectly, in consistency with the other duties in which they are engaged! But why should such services devolve on them exclusively, while

others can be found qualified for stating, with clearness and simplicity, to perishing sinners, the only foundation of hope before God? I have often regretted, when perhaps called to visit a poor, ignorant creature, on a sick bed, at a distant part of the town, that other avocations unavoidably made the visits I could pay such a one comparatively few. If, however, Christian brethren live in the neighbourhood, and have access to know such cases of distress, especially when accompanied with such ignorance; while they can tell these children of affliction, what it is that brings peace to the guilty, there is a neglect of an opportunity of usefulness, if that duty is disregarded.

But are there not among Christians, some who, though not employed in any public station in the church of Christ, are fitted, by their various endowments, for the most extensive and important fields of exertion? Let me here select an illustration of the very beneficial effects of the principle I am recommending, by supposing a well-known and justly esteemed public character, Mr. WILBERFORCE, a member of a church which acted upon it. Would his brethren rest satisfied, if, in all their social meetings, such a man should remain altogether silent? Would it be proper, merely because, from other avocations, he could not accept of the pastoral office, that the church should be entirely deprived of the use of those gifts, which would be so eminently calculated to edify? Who would not feel a peculiar interest in beholding that eloquence, which has so often burned in the senate, and described so feelingly the horrors of African slavery, and the blessed

consequences resulting from its abolition, employed in delineating the miseries of those who are the slaves of sin, and in illustrating the glories of that liberty with which Christ makes his people free.

But not only might such talents be extensively beneficial to the church; they might also be employed, with singular advantage, in rousing the attention of a careless world. How plainly would expediency, and a regard to the greatest possible good, dictate the frequent application of them in such a service! It has often been justly remarked, that the valuable work with which Mr. W. has favoured the world, on the important subject of religion, has been far more extensively read, than a similar publication would have been, though written with equal ability, had it come from the pen of one who was statedly and professedly employed as a minister of the Gospel. Would he not enjoy a similar advantage, if, while known as a member of Parliament, and the persevering advocate of the rights of long-injured Africa, he were occasionally, at least, to address men on the still more important topic of the things that belong to their eternal peace? Many, who would hear no other preacher, might be induced from curiosity, to listen to the word of life from his lips, and many who sit, with listless indifference, under the address of those whom they consider as using merely the language of a profession, might have their attention aroused to the momentous subjects connected with immortality, by the situation and character of the speaker, while it would be arrested by that variety of illustration, which he

could pour around whatever topic came under his review.

What is here expressed as an object so desirable has, since the publication of the former editions of these pieces, been so far realized. I refer to those numerous effusions of eloquence that have of late years been poured forth in almost every part of Christendom, and by persons in all the various situations of life, at the meetings of Bible societies. What is it that gives to these meetings so peculiar an interest? Not merely the variety of talent these discovered, but the great variety in the external circumstances of those by whom these meetings are addressed. When an audience has been instructed, charmed, and electrified, by those powerful representations of the value of the word of God, which on such occasions many a private Christian has laid before them, may it not be a fair subject of regret, that these talents for public usefulness can only be thus employed perhaps once or twice a year at such meetings; and that at no other period is the Christian community permitted to enjoy the benefit that might be derived from them?

Much enjoyment may the esteemed character I have selected to illustrate this part of the subject, possess, in the final success that has crowned his unwearied labours to promote the abolition of the African Slave Trade. The pleasure arising from this quarter, especially when these labours have been dictated by Christian principles, must be of a very pure and exalted kind. Exalted as it is, however, he himself will allow, it cannot equal that which is derived from being instrumental in making

men acquainted with that truth, by which alone they can be delivered from the wrath to come. Who that knows the value of salvation to his own soul, does not burn with a sacred ardour to participate in the high honour and happiness of leading some of his perishing fellow-mortals to the knowledge of eternal life? Who would not consider every sacrifice trifling, if a portion of this happiness may be attained? May a spirit of holy zeal be poured on all the disciples of Jesus, to be found, according to the different talents bestowed upon them, fellow-workers for God! Animated with this divine ambition, may they unremittingly aspire after this highest of all honours, which can be conferred on man, while in his cottage of clay!

But I shall suppose another case that frequently occurs in churches; I mean that of members, who discover good radical talents for usefulness, while, from want of cultivation in early life, such talents are less likely to be turned to a useful account, than if proper means of improvement were afforded to those who possess them. Here it seems plainly the duty of churches, in as far as lies in their power, to afford to such brethren, those opportunities of improvement by which their usefulness might be promoted. In most of situations, where churches are planted, it will be found that there are many fields for preaching the word in the surrounding neighbourhood, which either cannot be occupied at all, or occupied very partially by the pastors. If there be other brethren in a church, then, qualified to be useful, why should their gifts not be called forth in such a service?

I am well aware, when I speak of doing any thing to improve the natural talents of the brethren, by human learning, as it is called, some will be disposed to listen to what is suggested with a jealous ear. They will ask, where is any thing of this kind spoken of in Scripture? Is there any mention made of colleges or academies there; and is not resorting to these institutions too much like trusting in human means, for the diffusion of divine truth, instead of depending entirely on the blessing of God?

I am not here to plead the cause of particular seminaries of education. It matters not to me where a man gets knowledge, if he has it. My short reply, however, to the objection just stated, is this. There is one great, general rule laid down in Scripture, which is applicable in every age, and in every country: "Let all things be done to the use of edifying." I shall here select one kind of human learning, the utility of which, to those who would preach the Gospel, for general edification, in such a country as this, at least, must be apparent to every one who considers the subject. I allude to a man's being able to speak, with tolerable grammatical accuracy, his own language. In consequence of the diffusion of literature, arising from the art of printing, there is now such a general acquaintance with language among the body of the people, that most of them can easily discover where a man in public address violates the common rules of language,—that there is something wrong, though they cannot tell why it is so, and far less can they put it right. If this then is a fact, it is surely not doing things to the use of edifying, if we unnec-

essarily excite men's prejudices against what they hear, by such a deficiency in the manner in which we speak. Besides, it will be almost universally found, that some portion of education greatly contributes to the perspicuity with which even those, who have good radical gifts, state their sentiments to others. While we believe, then, that God works by means, it is certainly no indication of our forgetting, that it is by his blessing alone his word becomes effectual, if we assert that it is more likely to be so, when prejudice is laid asleep, than when it is roused, and when truth is stated with perspicuity and accuracy, than with obscurity and confusion.

When we read in Scripture of the word of the Lord sounding out from the apostolic churches to all the surrounding neighbourhood, 1 Thess. 1. there seems reason to think, that this was done by those united exertions of all the brethren, of which we have been speaking; by each occupying that field of usefulness for which his particular talents best qualified him. In the short account given in Scripture of Apollos, we have one striking example of the immediate application of gifts of usefulness, wherever they were found. It is recorded, Acts 18: 24. From this passage it is plain, that Apollos possessed eminent talents for public address. From the fervour of his spirit, he was disposed to turn these to the best account, even when his knowledge of divine truth was very limited. Those amiable disciples, Aquila and Priscilla, observing this, were anxious to improve his knowledge, and imparted to him what additional information they possessed respecting the way of the Lord, that his eloquence

might be employed in presenting it, with perspicuity and energy, to the minds of his brethren. Nothing is more manifest, than that he was no pastor of any church when he was at Ephesus, and as little was he clothed with this office when he first went into Achaia, and mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. Whether he ever was placed in the pastoral office, is, I suppose, a matter of total uncertainty. But whether he ever was so or not, it is evident, from the manner in which Paul speaks of him, 1 Cor. 3:6. that he was extensively useful in edifying the churches of Christ.

Some may, perhaps, feel a sort of jealousy of the principle I have been recommending, from the apprehension, that, if it were reduced to practice, it would tend in a considerable measure to supersede the pastoral office altogether; as others would be found engaging in many of those services which have been considered as exclusively connected with it. This jealousy, however, appears quite unfounded. The more the knowledge of Christianity is extended, the more its importance must be discerned, and the more minute and sacred a regard will be paid to all its institutions. No one can doubt that the pastoral office is one of these. If any one, then, is afraid that it will be brought into contempt, let him recollect that this must arise from ignorance, not from knowledge; from the prevalence of unbelief, and not from subjection to the authority of the word of God. The more men are impressed with the truth and importance of Christianity, the more will they see the necessity of that pastoral

care which requires a man's whole time, and undivided attention; and instead of there being any ground for jealousy between a pastor and his gifted brethren, the labours of the former may be much more extensively useful, by being seconded by the more limited exertions of the latter. In whatever way men's attention is led to the word of God, they will feel themselves constrained, not only to wait statedly upon the public administration of it, but also to unite themselves with a church of Christ. In this way, they will not only add to the number of the stated hearers of the Gospel, but to that of those to whom pastoral care is to be extended.

The above remarks are submitted to the consideration of all who feel interested in the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom; and I should be truly happy, if they should be the means of exciting a more minute examination of what the Scripture contains, on the subject to which to they relate. If I have misapprehended the import of the word of God, on this or any other subject, I hope I shall ever be disposed to listen to any proof that my views are inaccurate. On some of the points introduced under this article, I may differ in opinion from some, in whose sentiments, on other subjects, I most cordially acquiesce. But I wish, if possible, to engage in *inquiry*, not in *controversy*. As I have endeavoured to guard against dogmatical assertion in the above remarks, I hope, whatever objections may be brought against them, that they will appear in the form of calm and dispassionate inquiry, and breathe the spirit they ought.

If the word of God require the united exertions of

Christians in the common cause ; if it appears a principle laid down in Scripture, that the great design of the Head of the church, in the bestowment of gifts, (whether in the form of miraculous communication, or of natural talents,) is, that wherever they are imparted, they should be applied, in one shape or another, to active usefulness ; if this was the principle on which the apostolic churches manifestly acted, it is certainly one, which has been by almost all classes of Christians very little regarded. I have been induced to dwell the longer in illustrating its importance and advantages, from a conviction, that the application of it is closely interwoven with a more extensive diffusion of divine truth. Our country, we may safely assert, is, in a religious point of view, highly favoured ; and yet, in many places, not only gross ignorance prevails, but the means of removing that ignorance are not enjoyed. Now, whence is this ? Is it from want of gifts among Christians, taken collectively ? No ! Had we that apostolic zeal and self-denial, that would dispose men, qualified to be useful, to go to those places where they were most likely to do good ; were their Christian brethren, on the other hand, who are possessed of property, to come forward, and second their efforts, with that promptitude and liberality which compassion for perishing souls should inspire ; would there not be found gifts in abundance, to penetrate every corner of the land, to leave the inhabitants of no place destitute of some tolerable means of being made acquainted with the way that leads to eternal life.

Not many years ago, we heard much of the alarm

of invasion on England. But if this event, so much to be deprecated, should ever be realized, surely nothing like jealousy would subsist in regard to those who might attempt to retard the progress of the enemy. It would not be thought exclusively the province of military men. Whoever should contribute to harass him, to defeat any of his attempts, to cut off his supplies, or check his progress, would justly be considered as deserving well of his country. Our world has been invaded by ignorance and wickedness, in close combination. These most formidable foes have spread their baneful influence to the destruction of the present happiness and future hopes of its inhabitants. The enemy is at our gates. He is to be met with in every quarter. Many are daily falling victims to his sway. Ought it then to be thought improper for any one to endeavour to arrest that wide-spreading desolation that marks his steps, because they do not belong to some corps of regular troops professionally employed in the service? No! The case is too urgent. The enemy is in the midst of us. Our fellow-citizens are perishing. Is there not rather an imperious call for Christians to rise *en masse*, and every one employing the weapon he can use to most advantage, to do what in him lies to exterminate, if possible, such formidable foes from our world?

CHAPTER II.

OF CHOOSING A PASTOR.

SOME members of churches are apt to think, that a pastor cannot with propriety be chosen, without different persons being proposed for the office ; that where there is not variety, there can be no election. This seems, however, to be by no means necessary ; and if a church should be satisfied that a brother, who has been some time among them, is possessed of those pastoral qualifications which the Scriptures require, and find that he is one in whom they can unite, it will generally be found greatly to contribute to their harmony and comfort, to fix upon such a person, without naming any other. It usually happens, that the greater variety that is proposed, the more difficult it will be found to arrive at unanimity. All that is necessary to the pastoral relation is, that the pastor be the object of the choice of the church. If this is the case, it is not necessary that others should have been mentioned. Those, indeed, who know what is in human nature, will consider it a great advantage, if a church can come to unanimity in the choice of a pastor, without naming any one but the person who is the object of their election.

If different persons be proposed, there is a considerable risk of a church falling into a spirit of party, and of something occurring which may prove preju-

dicial to the mutual affection of those whose names are mentioned, as well as injurious, in other respects, to their spiritual profit. The one on whom the choice falls may be unsuitably elated, and secretly value himself on some supposed superiority, while occasion may be given for a spirit of envy or jealousy being excited in others.

Some may allege, that the supposition of these effects being produced, would argue a great deal of remaining imperfection in those in whom they are to be found. This is readily granted. Churches, we must recollect, are composed of imperfect beings; and though we are sure, that all that trial of the character, and that discovery of remaining imperfection, which takes place in executing the laws of Christ, will ultimately prove beneficial, we are not authorized to add to these trials, by adopting any mode of procedure, which the execution of these laws does not require. If we do so, and subject a brother to trials of our own devising, instead of following out the spirit of the Gospel, we may injure his mind, by unnecessarily throwing a stumbling-block in his way. All that we here contend for, is, that, in the way in which we endeavour to attain our object, any risk of this kind, if possible, should be avoided.

If it should be asked, how can it be ascertained that a church wishes to invite one individual in preference to another, to take the pastoral care of them, unless others be named? we reply, a church may surely say whether or not a particular person be the object of their choice. If he be not, this may be either directly expressed, or a delay may be asked,

if they are not prepared for such a decision. If the church agree to such a mode of procedure, the liberty of none is abridged, and many evils may be avoided. The only design of this hint is, to induce churches to unite in adopting such a mode of conduct as would most effectually preserve them from those evils into which, in certain situations, they are apt to fall ; and to secure, what is surely most desirable, unanimity and cordiality in every part of their procedure.

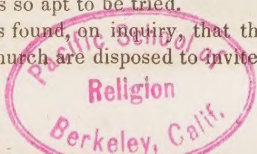
When the members of a church are about to proceed to the choice of a pastor, while they ought to engage in it with much fervent prayer to God for his direction and blessing, they ought to do it under an impression, that great caution, patience, and mutual forbearance, must be exercised. It is a situation, of all others, where men's tempers are apt to be tried, and where there is a great danger of their being betrayed into an improper spirit. They ought, therefore, to put a special guard on every thing they say or do ; to watch well every movement of their minds, that they may detect and resist the first appearance of evil. We see, in this way, the special propriety of what appears to have been the apostolic practice, engaging in this service with fasting and prayer : Acts 14:23.

One obvious difficulty attending the choice of a pastor, lies in this. In the apostolic writings we have certain qualifications mentioned, which must be found united in a man's character, before he can, with propriety, be invited to the pastoral office. But it is a matter that must be necessarily left to the judgment of every member of a church, whether or

not the person that is named possesses these qualifications. This is a difficulty not often attended to. Some are apt to say, — Are not the qualifications of a bishop clearly mentioned in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus? It is then a very plain matter; you are simply to judge by these. All this is true. But what have we in these Epistles? We have indeed general principles laid down, that are sufficiently clear; but the difficulty lies in applying them to the particular case that occurs.

Before any member can conscientiously join in inviting one to the pastoral office, it must be a matter of conviction with him, that that person, in some measure, possesses the qualifications that are requisite. But some may have much better access to know a particular character than others. From their special intimacy with a brother, they may, upon good grounds, be fully satisfied that he is of good behaviour, patient, not self-willed, not soon angry, &c.; while others, without indulging the smallest prejudice, may not have the same access to know this, and of course may not be equally prepared for forming a decision. But does it not sometimes happen, that as soon as an individual is satisfied himself, he is apt to ascribe it to disaffection to the object of his choice, if others are not satisfied too? This is human nature; it is what all are liable to; and these hints are suggested, that Christians may see the necessity of the greatest patience and mutual forbearance, when placed in circumstances in which the temper is so apt to be tried.

When it is found, on inquiry, that the great majority of a church are disposed to invite a brother to



be their pastor, those who at first might have difficulties, ought to do what they can to get them removed. If we are influenced by a proper spirit, we shall be concerned, not only about our personal edification, but the edification of our brethren. The language, then, of the general body, in such a choice, is, we believe this brother to possess the requisite qualifications for a pastor. Among others, we find him qualified to teach, and reap benefit from his labours. Wherever this is so clearly expressed, it ought not to be considered a light matter with us to obstruct the general edification. No inferior consideration, such as our not being so fond of a particular person's mode of address, &c. should lead us to oppose his election to the pastoral office. It would require something of real weight, something that would bear examination, to justify such a conduct; and if we are not disposed to hear, with candor and patience, whatever may tend to remove our difficulty, we are not manifesting the spirit of the Gospel.

Where there is not, in the first instance, that unanimity in inviting a particular person as a pastor that could be wished, the majority ought carefully to guard against imputing the difficulties or objections of their brethren to an improper motive. This, unless there is very decisive evidence of it, is surely inconsistent with that charity which hopeth all things, and thinketh no evil. If such a charge be insinuated, particularly when there is a consciousness in those accused that it is false, a temptation is thrown in their way to persist in their opposition, though the original grounds of it should be removed.

This is what we by no means justify ; but we ought to guard against exposing one another to such a temptation. On the other hand, I have seen the happiest consequences arise from hearing the objections of brethren with patience, treating them with candor, giving them time to have their difficulties removed, and adopting every conciliatory method which might tend to do so. The admirable rule of Scripture ought in this case, as in every other, to be kept in view, "Whatsoever ye would that others should do to you, do ye even so to them." It is simple, and of easy and universal application. Let one who has himself no difficulty, when the trial is first made, whether or not a church will unite in choosing a certain individual to the pastoral office, suppose himself among those who are not yet quite satisfied as to the propriety of such a measure. Let him ask, how he would expect his brethren, if influenced by Christian principles, to treat him, were circumstances thus reversed ? and let the answer to this question be the rule of his conduct.

An attention to these hints will, we are persuaded, in a considerable measure, contribute to promote unanimity in a church. We know, however, it has sometimes happened, that the choice of a pastor has occasioned so great a difference, as to produce a direct schism in the body, by causing one part of the members actually to separate from the other. I believe it may be very safely asserted, that, in most cases, at least, where this takes place, there must have been something materially defective, something either on the one side or the other radically wrong. This consideration should lead each party,

in such a case, to the most serious examination of their temper and conduct.

Before any of the disciples of Jesus think of such a step, there are many things that ought to be taken into the account. They ought, in the first place, to consider how directly it is opposed to that mutual forbearance which is so warmly inculcated by our Lord and his Apostles. They should also weigh well the consequences of such a measure. They should reflect on the stumbling-block that is thrown in the way of their brethren; on the discouragement that is given by such a conduct to inquirers; on the handle they give to the world against their Christian profession; and on the false quiet they administer to Christians, who are living in unscriptural situations, by seeing the evils into which they fall, who profess to be solely guided by the word of God. When, besides the opposition of such a measure to the plain spirit of the Gospel, these, and similar baneful effects, are taken into view, surely such as feel a tender concern for the cause of the Lord Jesus in the world, will gladly adopt any expedient consistent with duty, by which such evils may be avoided.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL RELIGION IN
THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY, AND THE DANGER
OF RESTING SATISFIED WITH THE MERE OFFICIAL
DISCHARGE OF PUBLIC DUTY IN ITS ROOM.

ON this subject, the following extracts from Mr. Booth's Pastoral Cautions* are well worthy the serious attention of every one employed in the ministry of the word.

“Make it your daily prayer, and your diligent endeavour, therefore, to *feel* the importance of those truths you have long believed — of those doctrines you now preach. Often inquire at the mouth of conscience, what you experience of their comforting, reproving, and sanctifying power? When you have been preaching the promises of grace, or urging the precepts of duty, earnestly pray that their practical influence may appear in your own dispositions and conduct. Endeavour to realize the force, and to comply with the requisition of that precept, ‘Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’

* This tract, which will be found quoted oftener than once in the following pages, is entitled “Pastoral Cautions: an Address to the late Mr. Thomas Hopkins, when ordained Pastor of the Church of Christ in Eagle Street, Red Lion Square, London, July 13th, 1785.” It was published in 1805.

“In proportion as the principles of true piety are vigorous in your heart, may you be expected to fill up the wide circumference of pastoral duty. For there is no reason to fear that a minister, if tolerably furnished with gifts, will be remarkably deficient or negligent in any known branch of pastoral obligation, while his heart is alive to the enjoyments and to the duties of the *Christian* character. It is from the pastor's defects, considered under the notion of a *disciple*, that his principal difficulties and chief dangers arise. For, my brother, it is only on the permanent basis of genuine Christian piety, that your pastoral character can be established, or appear with respectability, in the light of the New Testament. I called genuine Christian piety *permanent*; because every thing essential to it will abide, and flourish in immortal vigour; whereas the pastoral office, though honourable and important when connected with true godliness, must soon be laid aside, as inconsistent with the heavenly state.

“*Take heed to yourself, LEST YOU MISTAKE AN INCREASE OF GIFTS FOR A GROWTH IN GRACE.* Your knowledge of the Scriptures, your abilities for explaining them, and your ministerial talents in general, may considerably increase, by reading, study, and public exercise; while real godliness is far from flourishing in your heart. For, among all the apostolic churches, none seem to have abounded more in the enjoyment of spiritual gifts than the church at Corinth; yet few of them appear to have been in a more unhappy state, or more deserving of reproof. I have long been of opinion, my brother, that no professors of the genuine Gospel have more need to

be on their guard against self-deception, respecting the true state of religion in their own souls, than those who statedly dispense the gracious truth. For, as it is their *calling* and their *business*, frequently to read their Bibles, and to think much on spiritual things — to pray and preach, and often to converse about the affairs of piety ; they will, if not habitually cautious, do it all *ex officio*, or merely as the work of their ministerial calling, without feeling their own interest in it.

“To grow in love to God, and in zeal for his honour, in conformity to the will of Christ, and in heavenly mindedness, should be your first concern. Look well, therefore, to your internal character. For it is awful to think of *appearing* as a minister, without being *really* a Christian ; or of any one officially watching over the souls of others, who is habitually unmindful of his own immortal interests.

“In the course of your public ministry, and in a great variety of instances, you may perhaps find it impracticable to enter into the true spirit of a precept, or of a prohibition, so as to reach its full meaning, and its various application, without feeling yourself *convicted* by it. In cases of this kind, you must fall under the conviction secretly before God, and pray over it with undissembled contrition : agreeably to that saying, ‘Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?’ When ministers hardly ever make this practical application of their public admonitions and cautions, as if their own spiritual interests were not concerned in them, their consciences will grow callous, and their situation, with regard to eternity, extremely dangerous. For, this being ha-

bitually neglected, how can they be considered as ‘walking *humbly* with God?’ which, nevertheless, is of such essential importance in the Christian life, that, without it, all pretences to true piety are vain. Hence an author, of no small repute in the churches of Christ, says: ‘He that would go down to the pit in peace, let him keep up duties in his family and closet; let him hear, as often as he can have opportunity; let him speak often of good things; let him leave the company of profane and ignorant men, until he have obtained a great repute for religion; let him preach, and labour to make others better than he is himself; and, in the mean time, *neglect to humble his heart, to walk with God in a manifest holiness and usefulness*, and he will not fail of his end.’*

“Yes, my brother, it is required that pastors, in their own persons and conduct, especially in the discharge of ministerial duties, give a just representation of the doctrine they preach, and of him in whose name they dispense it. But in order to do this, though in an imperfect manner, what integrity, benevolence, humility, meekness, and zeal for the glory of God; what self-denial and readiness for bearing the cross; what mortification of corrupt affections and inordinate desires of earthly things; what condescension and patience; what contempt of the world, and heavenly mindedness, are necessary,—not only the Scripture declares, but the nature of the thing shows.

“Study your discourses therefore with a devotional disposition. To this you are bound by the very nature of the case, as a Christian minister. For,

* Dr. Owen’s *Sermons and Tracts*, p. 47. folio. London, 1721.

when the Bible is before you, it is the word of God on which you meditate, and the work of God you are preparing to perform.—It is reported of Dr. COTTON MATHER, ‘That, in studying and preparing his sermons before he preached them, he would endeavour to make even that an exercise of devotion for his own soul. Accordingly his way was, at the end of every paragraph, to make a pause, and endeavour to make his own soul feel some holy impression of the truths contained in it. This, he thought, would be an excellent means of delivering his sermons with life and spirit, and warming the hearts of his people by them; and so he found it.’

“It is, indeed, an easy thing for a preacher to make loud professions of regard to the glory of God and the good of immortal souls, as the ruling motive in his ministerial conduct; but experience has taught me, that it is extremely difficult for any minister to act suitably to such professions. For as that pride, which is natural to our species, impels the generality of mankind to wish for eminence, rather than usefulness, in this or the other station; so it is with ministers of the word. Forty years ago I saw but little need of this caution, compared with that conviction of its necessity which I now have. A preacher of the real Gospel, I am fully persuaded, may appear exceedingly earnest and very faithful in his public labours, as if his only design were to promote the cause of truth, the happiness of men, and the honour of God; while, nevertheless, he is more concerned to figure away at the head of a large body of people in the religious world, than to ad-

vance the genuine interests of Jesus Christ, and the felicity of his fellow-mortals."

One very striking quotation from Dr. Owen occurs in the preceding extract. I shall conclude this article with another, containing a most important truth, stated in that short, sententious way which makes it more easily retained in the memory, and which certainly ought to be kept in the remembrance of every man professing godliness, whether he occupy a public or a private station: "Unto whom Christ is the *hope of future glory*, unto them he is the *life of present grace*."—*Meditations on the glory of Christ*, p. 58.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PASTORAL RELATION ENTIRELY A CONFIDENTIAL ONE.

THOSE who are acquainted with the history of the church of Christ, know the baneful effects produced by the spirit of priestcraft in every age; in other words, they know how much inquiry has been checked, and the cause of truth injured, by the false respect paid to public teachers, merely because they occupied that office, and altogether independent of their real character. Among the extremes, however, to which the human mind is liable, it is certainly possible to lean too far to the opposite side. While the Scriptures, on the one hand, clearly point

out what sort of characters ought to occupy the pastoral office, they as clearly, on the other, enjoin obedience to such rulers as are there described, and require that they be treated by their brethren with the utmost confidence and affection. Thus, Heb. 13:17, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Again, 1 Thess. 5:12, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know [acknowledge] them that labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you: and esteem them very highly in love, for their works' sake."

From every thing said in Scripture, respecting the pastoral relation, it is plainly represented as one of the most confidential kind, and of course it will only be found either comfortable or useful, where this confidence remains inviolate. On this account, both pastors and people should keep at the greatest distance, from talking of their respective rights, and pretending to define the exact limits of these. It seems plain, that this is not done in Scripture. Accordingly, those who have written on this subject, after labouring to specify certain limitations, respecting the power of the pastor, and the obedience of the people, have been able to establish, from Scripture at least, nothing more than the general injunction of rule, on the one hand, and submission on the other.

In examining the works of nature, wherever we discover what seems to us a defect, it will be allowed, that, according to the principles of sound philos-

ophy, we ought to ascribe such an appearance of imperfection to our own ignorance. In such a case, it will generally be found, that a more minute examination, and an increase of knowledge, not only removes every appearance of what is defective, but shows, that what at first sight seemed to be so, is in reality a beauty and an excellence. What thus takes place in examining the works of nature, equally holds, if our inquiries relate to what is contained in another department of the works of the same all-wise Being,—the word of God. If any thing seems to us there either defective or superfluous, let us ever impute such an appearance to our own ignorance. Let us recollect, it must be owing to something false in our views, that we do not discover wisdom manifested, not only where Scripture speaks, but where it is silent; not only in what is revealed, but also in that revelation not being more minute and extensive than it is.

The subject before us seems to furnish an illustration of the preceding remarks. This appears from the great design of the Head of the church being most effectually secured, by that precise measure of information, respecting the relative duties and obligations of pastor and people, which the Scriptures contain. This design plainly is to establish a spiritual kingdom, and to secure spiritual worshippers. If this then be admitted, it will be a great recommendation of the view we take of any of his institutions, if it not only accord with this design, but also put a bar in the way of what might tend to defeat it; if, from its very nature, it furnish a check against men deceiving themselves; if it carry in its

bosom what forms a security against their substituting, in the room of genuine Christianity, something like it, but to the existence of which, spiritual obedience is not necessary.

This, then, is precisely the case here. Let love and confidence between rulers and ruled subsist, and there is no need of any more minute description of the relative rights and obligations of either party. Let this confidence be destroyed, and you no doubt need more minute regulations. But where are you to look for them? Not in the word of God; for it was intended for one precise state of things; that, namely, in which such confidence obtains. So far is the want of something more specific here, from bordering on imperfection, that much of the wisdom of the Lawgiver is discernible in it. If men lose sight of the Gospel, they are off Christian ground; and it is wise, it is gracious, in the Head of the church, to leave them without regulations. This shows they are not in that state which he designed, and to which alone his institutions are accommodated.

The truth of these observations is strikingly confirmed by the history of the church of Christ. During the period of the personal ministry of the Apostles, Christians needed no other regulations in their associated capacity, than those contained in the word of God. In proportion as men deviated from the spirit and simplicity of the early churches, by introducing human inventions, it was found that there were no regulations in Scripture suited to such a new state of things. To meet such a state, then, it became necessary to resort to new regulations,

founded on human wisdom and human authority ; and as such regulations were far better suited to the then existing circumstances, than the simple institutions of the Lord Jesus, these were of course soon supplanted, and the inventions of men substituted in their stead. When men come back to the apostolic order, they will find not only that they need no other regulations than those which the word of God contains, but also that all these are necessary ; that they form one beautiful whole, which is equally injured by addition and diminution ; and that the better they are understood, the more eminently they display that divine wisdom and goodness by which they were instituted.

The wisdom of that limitation, which we find in the regulations mentioned in the Scriptures, regarding the pastoral relation, may be farther illustrated by observing, what the same inspired volume contains in reference to another relation, I mean that of husband and wife. The authority of the husband, and the obedience of the wife, are simply stated, like the power of church rulers and the submission of the ruled, and there it is left. Wherever the spirit of the marriage relation subsists, nothing more is necessary. On the other hand, whenever it becomes a subject of discussion, how far the authority of the husband should extend, and what boundary should limit the obedience of the wife ; I suppose all will allow the peace and comfort of that family is nearly at an end. If any, in such a case, should consult the Scriptures, for some precise regulation upon the subject, they would certainly be disappointed. The reason is plain. The regulations of

Scripture are designed for Christian husbands and wives. To such, what is said is quite sufficient. But where the spirit of the relation is gone, things are there entirely removed from their scriptural foundation; and we are not to look for any direction. It is a state not intended by the Lawgiver, and of course there is nothing in his injunctions that is accommodated to it.

Where the pastoral relation then is formed, it is of much importance that the people feel the fullest confidence, that it is the great aim of their pastors to promote the spiritual good of their flock; while they ought to feel a similar confidence, on the other hand, that it is the desire of the churches to know the will of the Lord Jesus, and to submit to his authority, wherever it is pointed out. Great care should be taken to avoid whatever might tend to impair this confidence. With this view, it ought to be the study of the deacons, to prevent a pastor from ever having occasion to speak, at least with a personal view of the claim of those who serve at the altar, to live by the altar. This has almost invariably a disagreeable effect. The rapacity of the priesthood is almost proverbial. On this account, however moderate a man's desires may be, however reasonable his expectations, that, if he devotes his time and talents to the public good, his brethren should, if in their power, enable him to live without anxiety about the things of the world; many cannot distinguish between the covetousness of those who would make a gain of godliness, and the reasonable expectations, founded on divine authority, of a faithful servant of Christ. Whenever a public teacher

speaks of the means of support, it almost uniformly suggests a suspicion that he is influenced by a spirit of covetousness. Now, a suspicion of this kind not only tends to impair the confidence of his brethren, but it is also exceedingly apt to affect a man's usefulness to others who attend upon his ministry. Wherever, then, it is understood that a pastor is supported by the church, in lieu of his time being entirely devoted to public usefulness, it is plainly the duty of the deacons to see, if the church can afford it, that he be able to live without carefulness.

In speaking of this subject, I may notice one kind of expense, of which many members of churches have very little conception, while, at the same time, it is of much importance to them that their pastors have funds to meet it. I mean the expense of procuring a proper collection of useful books. I find most of churches very desirous of having pastors, not only of extensive gifts for usefulness, but also who have enjoyed the advantage of some measure of education; and, indeed, no one who knows the value of education will question its utility, if accompanied with the other qualities necessary to the pastoral office. But many little reflect, that one principal end of education is to fit a man for using books, while, if he has not books to use, it can be of comparatively little service to him. To use a familiar illustration: A person made acquainted with the languages, in which the Scriptures were originally written, is like one taught the use of certain tools. These, if he has an opportunity of using them, he may turn to a valuable account; but if he is placed

in a situation where he has no access to them, his capacity of using them will be of little avail.

Without laying undue stress upon human writings, it cannot be denied, that, among the numerous authors who have directed their attention to the explanation and illustration of Scripture, many useful hints have been suggested, which it would be unreasonable to expect would occur to the mind of any individual. A pastor, then, by having access to such writings, may be the means of greatly contributing to the improvement of a church, by enlarging their knowledge of the word of God. It is in this point of view that the members of a church are personally interested, in furnishing their pastor, if it be in their power, with the means of improvement he would derive from this quarter. In fine, churches ought to see that they have none for pastors, but those in whom they have the fullest confidence that they are devoted to the work of the Lord; and while they have such pastors, it ought to be the study of the brethren to prevent their activity from being impaired, or their usefulness abridged, either by their attention being distracted about the means of support, or by the want of any means of personal improvement, with which it is in the power of the church to furnish them.

CHAPTER V.*

OF THE SUPPORT OF PASTORS.

IN the preceding chapter, mention was made of the temporal support of pastors being founded on divine authority. Of late, indeed, some have been disposed to question how far there is any obligation, from Scripture, on churches to contribute for this purpose; or, whatever their ability in this way may be, if it is not their duty rather to call persons to the pastoral office who receive the means of their subsistence from some secular calling; and it is well known that some sects in this country avowedly act on this last-mentioned principle. I am well aware, when any thing is either said or written on this subject, by those who derive even partial support from their brethren, in lieu of devoting their time to the public service, there is an immediate danger of their being suspected of selfishness. Upon this point, however, we shall only remark, what every one pos-

* A short time before a third edition of this volume was called for, a pamphlet appeared from the pen of Mr. Jackson of Manchester, replying to a very able sermon, by Mr. Bennet of Rotherham, on the subject of the support of pastors, where the author particularly notices also the contents of this article. Mr. Jackson's leading position is, — that support was commanded to be given to apostles, missionaries, and evangelists, but not to the stated pastors of churches. Every one must see that he had a very formidable difficulty to overcome in maintaining this position, when he came to consider the plain injunction to Timothy, that the elders who rule well should be counted worthy of double honour

sessed of the smallest candor or discernment must at once admit, that selfishness is not necessarily confined to one side of the question. It is at least just as possible, that selfishness may incline those *to withhold*, who are called to *give*, as those *to claim*, who are called to *receive*. No general suspicion or charge of this kind will satisfy any man who desires to be influenced by divine authority. This point, like all of a similar nature, can only be determined by an appeal to the oracles of truth. If they do not sanction the support of pastors, that support churches ought undoubtedly to withhold. Let us not, however, form a decision too hastily; but, laying aside all prejudice, let us fairly attend to the testimony of Scripture upon the subject. The following passages seem very clear and decisive.

Luke 10:7. Our Lord, in the directions he gives to the seventy disciples he sent out to preach the Gospel, says, "In the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give; for the labourer is worthy of his hire." In these last words, a general principle is stated, and applied to those who preached the Gospel. The same principle we find more fully unfolded and inculcated in the passages that follow.

1 Cor. 9:7. "Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man, or saith not the law the same also. For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for

oxen? or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, it is written, that he that plougheth should plough in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope, should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless, we have not used this power, but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the Gospel of Christ. Do ye not know, that they who minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple; and they who wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." The whole of this passage seems so plain, that it needs little or no commentary. The object of the Apostle obviously is, to establish the claim which he had, as employed in preaching the Gospel, for support from those who professed to receive it. This claim, indeed, for certain reasons, he saw it proper to relinquish; but this circumstance does not affect the scope of his reasoning. In his reasoning on the subject, he alludes to the case of the Priests and Levites under the law, who derived the means of subsistence from the particular services in which they were employed; and he expressly asserts, that the Lord ordained, that those who preach the Gospel should in this respect be on the same footing.

Some have objected to the application of this passage to the duty of Christian churches to support those who preach the Gospel, by alleging that it is only applicable to the Apostles. As there is no such

limitation, however, hinted in the text, it requires to be proved that it was intended. But, instead of there being any evidence of such a limitation, there is something in the passage directly inconsistent with it. Thus, in the verse immediately following, the Apostle adds, "But I have used none of these things; neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me." Here he expressly asserts, that the principle he was establishing was one which he was determined should not affect him personally. Before, then, such a limitation could possibly be admitted, we must suppose the Apostle, contrary to his universal practice, spending his time in establishing a merely speculative principle that was not to be acted upon, and one that could be of no use to the church of Christ after the apostolic age was over.

But the corresponding passages leave not a shadow of doubt or difficulty on this subject. We have already noticed, that the general principle stated in Luke, as above quoted, and of which this passage is only a more enlarged explanation, is applied, not to the Apostles, but to the seventy disciples; and the two additional passages we have to mention, cannot be understood as applying to the Apostle at all.

Thus, Gal. 6:6. "Let him that is taught in the word, communicate to him that teacheth in all good things." And, 1 Tim. 5:17. "Let the elders that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and doctrine." No one will surely argue, that these passages apply to the Apostles. In this last text, it is particularly observable, that the same general principle, as quot-

ed from Luke, is immediately subjoined, in connexion with the illustration from the Old Testament, that was introduced in the passage already mentioned in 1 Cor. 9:9. This shows the uniformity of the language of Scripture on this subject. Thus it is added, 1 Tim. 5:18, "For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn, and the labourer is worthy of his reward."

The example of Paul at Ephesus, and his address to the elders of the church there, has often been quoted, in opposition to the doctrine we have shown to be contained in the foregoing passages. Thus, Acts 20:34, he says, "Yea, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." But what is all that can be pleaded from this passage? It certainly shows, that Paul wrought with his hands at Ephesus, and that, for reasons in the situation of the church there, not made known to us, he called upon the elders of it to imitate his example. In this way, it shows the propriety of this in particular circumstances, which no one will dispute. Viewed in this light, this passage is in perfect harmony with the texts above quoted. If more is inferred from it, and if it is produced to oppose the obligation of churches that can afford it, to support pastors wholly engaged in the public service, it is rendered quite inconsistent with the passages already mentioned; and those who take such

a view of it are called to remove this inconsistency. The truth is, Paul gives us a general rule upon the subject before us, and mentions his own case as an exception. Those whose sentiments we are opposing, just reverse the order of Scripture; they make Paul's exception the general rule, and they only admit of what he makes the rule in certain extraordinary cases, which may be viewed as exceptions.

The true principle of explanation, however, which at once removes the apparent inconsistency between such a passage as this, in which Paul requires the elders at Ephesus to labour with their hands, and those in which he enjoins the support of pastors, is the consideration of the different classes which, in these different passages, are addressed. The Apostles of our Lord did not amuse one class by descanting upon the duties of another; but they addressed to each such admonitions as more immediately respected themselves. Is not the same thing done every day in ordaining pastors over churches? Are not pastors, with propriety, admonished to discover a spirit of disinterestedness, to show their flocks that they seek not theirs, but them; to be willing rather to labour, than be burdensome to their brethren? But would there be the smallest inconsistency in following up this address to a pastor, with an admonition to the church to give to him that teacheth in all good things; to do what in them lies to keep him from carefulness, and cheerfully to administer to his comfort and support? Not a whit more inconsistent is the address to the elders at Ephesus, with the doctrine so clearly enjoined on the members

of the church of Corinth, that "they who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel."

There is one text often urged against the doctrine we have been considering, from which, however, a little reflection will show the very opposite conclusion ought to be drawn. This passage is 1 Pet. 5: 2. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." Now, what is the obvious and unavoidable inference this affords? Does it not plainly imply, that it was common for those who took the oversight of the flock to receive support while they did so? Had not this been the case, there could have been no room for cautioning them against being influenced by a regard to filthy lucre. Such an admonition could have had no meaning, and never would have been thought of. On the other hand, admitting that it was customary to support elders, the propriety and importance of cautioning them in regard to the motives of their conduct, must be apparent to all.

While none, then, can object to those churches that are unable to do otherwise, having such pastors as derive their subsistence, either wholly or in part, from some secular calling, it is manifestly the duty, from Scripture, of such churches as can afford it, to have those engaged in the pastoral office wholly devoted to the public service. If we consider how unavoidably defective pastoral inspection must be, especially if the church be of a considerable size, where pastors are daily engaged in some secular employment, and how little they can do in such a case to preach the Gospel to those that are without,

there is much reason to fear, that where churches can afford it, and yet, in the face of such plain passages, deny the obligation of enabling their pastors to devote the best part of their time to public usefulness, they are under the influence of some false bias. There are certainly, at least, some precepts in the word of God, which, though they are in a capacity to observe, they avowedly neglect.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DANGER ARISING FROM THAT KNOWLEDGE WHICH PUFFETH UP.

EVERY one who has enjoyed any tolerable measure of education, must be sensible of the impression that is apt to be produced on a man's mind, when he has received some new acquisition to his knowledge. He is in great danger of feeling himself most improperly elated by it. He is disposed to contrast the present state of his information with what it was previously, as well as with the state of those with whom he used to associate, and who are perhaps as destitute of the acquirements he has now made, as he formerly was himself. This propensity is strengthened by two things. *First*, By a limited education; as it is chiefly in the first part of a man's progress in the acquisition of knowledge, that he is exposed to this evil. The more a man knows, the

less he perceives of what is new ; and the more, he sees, yet remains to be known. *Secondly*, It is farther strengthened, by persons being placed in a situation where they have more intercourse with those who know less than themselves, than with such as know more.

From these causes, as well as others, there is often a danger of young persons, when, fresh from a seminary of education, they first come forward to preach, imagining that the discoveries, which were but of late so new to themselves, are equally new to all they address. This is apt to beget a spirit of self-conceit, and to lead them to feel particularly gratified with those who flatter them with the idea that they deviate from the beaten track, either in their sentiments, or in their particular way of stating them. Along with this, they are in danger of questioning altogether either the Christianity or the discernment of those, who cannot all at once adopt their representations, or at least of supposing, that, if they know any thing of real religion at all, their attainments must be very low, and their views exceedingly inaccurate.

Here it is of the utmost importance, for all who profess to preach the Gospel, to recollect, that nothing is more disgusting in those who are thus employed, than the smallest appearance of self-conceit and affectation, and that nothing can tend more effectually to defeat the end, which every one who wishes to preach it with success, has in view. If errors are to be opposed, or knowledge increased, both these ends are to be accomplished, not by any thing that betokens a conviction of personal superi-

ority, but by fair, scriptural argument, and scriptural illustration. These will have more effect on all we would wish to influence, than the warmest language, or the severest invective. Nay, this last mode of address is usually found to produce effects the very reverse of conviction—opposition and disgust. If Timothy was called in meekness to instruct those that opposed themselves, what would Paul have said, if he had heard of those, whose attainments could not be very extensive, in the tone of self-confidence, treating with sarcasm and contempt, those who differed from them, not perhaps in any essential truth, but merely in the mode of expression which they thought, on particular subjects, ought to be adopted?

This evil is not peculiar to one class or another. It is founded on the common principles of our nature. How often has the complaint been heard in various circles of society, that a young man who seemed humble and spiritual, before he went to an academy or a college, had not been long there before he appeared quite a different character. This is surely not a necessary evil attending the acquisition of knowledge; but if it is so common a one, it loudly proclaims a call for special watchfulness. Indeed, I believe it is very generally admitted, by those whose observation is most matured by experience, that the period when a young man is devoting his attention to literary or scientific pursuits, though ultimately with the purest design, is of all others that, during which, his spirituality of mind is most in danger of being injured; and, on this account, the

period in which he requires the greatest vigilance and circumspection.

It is true, a little enlarged acquaintance, both with themselves and the world, usually corrects the errors into which young preachers are apt to fall. But it would be well, if they did not need such a lesson, often too dearly purchased, but would improve by the experience of their predecessors. Not only are the early labours of a preacher often counteracted, by the manifestation of such a spirit as I have mentioned; but a foundation has often been laid for prejudices, which remained after the cause which produced them was in a great measure removed.

I cannot, however, conclude this article, without suggesting a hint to members of churches on this subject. Some may be gratified, in reading these strictures, from the thought that the representation is too just; and they may be apt to feel a satisfaction, not of the most benevolent kind, when they cast about in their minds, and think of this or the other individual to whom they imagine the description will most fully apply. But are you not here blameable? Have you, with affection and fidelity, endeavoured to check or reprove what you saw to be wrong; or, instead of doing so, have you not noticed the defect to others, professedly lamenting over it to be sure, but never manifesting the reality of that grief, either in secret, at the throne of grace, or endeavouring, in the exercise of Christian love to your offending brother, to correct his inexperience, and to get those appearances done away, that were so displeasing to you? Have not some allowed prej-

udices to rankle in their minds, in consequence of certain early appearances in a public character, after the ground of these prejudices was completely removed, and when they ought rather to have rejoiced in perceiving the change? "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and behold a beam is in thine own eye."

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE JEALOUSY OF SUPERIOR TALENTS.

THE powerful tendency in the human mind, to feel a jealousy of superior talents, often forms an excellent, though secret test, by which preachers may try the purity of the motives by which they are influenced. There is no poison more subtle than this. Its operations must have proceeded a great length indeed, before it becomes apparent to others; but every man who is acquainted with his own heart, must know that it may insinuate itself into the mind, and in a certain degree exist, and produce very pernicious effects there, though the person who feels it has sense enough to conceal it. But can you cordially rejoice, though you see others not only excelling you in gifts, but getting faster forward in the improvement of these gifts than yourself? If not, there is evidently something wrong. There is deep cause of humiliation, and much to be

corrected. In other cases, where men are interested in the success of a particular cause, instead of being influenced by jealousy, they rejoice in all the ability that is brought forward in support of it. They exult in every fresh accession of strength it thus receives, and in every new display of talents in those who step forward to plead it. If you, then, are at all influenced by zeal for the prosperity of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, there is plainly along with that zeal, a great mixture of selfishness, from which it needs to be purified.

A worthy minister, who used to preach a week-day lecture in the city of London, heard a friend expressing his regret that it was so ill attended. "Oh! that," replied the minister, "is of very little consequence, as the Gospel is preached by several others in the same neighbourhood; and in such a situation, for any one to be very desirous that people should come and hear the Gospel from him, instead of others, seems as unreasonable, as it would be for one of the shopmen in a large shop to wish all the customers to come to his particular part of the counter. If the customers come at all, and the goods go off, in so far as he feels an interest in the prosperity of the shop, he will rejoice." It would not be easy to describe how much genuine Christianity is involved in such a sentiment. It will at once, and without the aid of any commentary, approve itself to every reader who understands the Gospel. May every preacher of the Word of Life feel and manifest a similar spirit!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NECESSITY OF PREACHERS GUARDING AGAINST
TALE-BEARERS.*

PREACHERS have much need to guard against hearing the tales which one member of a society may bring against others. This ought to be checked wherever it appears. Some characters may be weak enough to suppose, that this will tend to ingratiate them with a preacher; and if the person who brings the story has art enough to mingle a little flattery with it, telling him, perhaps, that his mentioning it to him is a particular mark of his confidence in his discretion and good sense, otherwise he would not have thought of divulging it for the world, he is very likely to succeed. Such kind and confidential friends should at once be reminded, that if they have any difficulty about the conduct of any one of their brethren, they should immediately go to himself, and not go about to retail their objection to others. Those employed in public service should be especially careful to set the most correct example themselves, of the strictest attention, in this respect, to the laws of the Lord Jesus. Wherever a preacher deviates from these, and lends a willing

* In this, and some of the other articles, I have used the more general designation of *preachers*, as the remarks are not applicable to pastors exclusively, but also to all who are employed in preaching the Gospel.

ear to the stories and secret surmises against others, that may be communicated to him, it will generally be found, that, by doing so, he lays up materials for much perplexity to himself, and much division and animosity in the society with which he is connected.

But if it is unseemly for preachers to listen to stories about any of the members of a society, is it not still more so, to give an ear to such as are related of other preachers? Some persons have so little sense, as to endeavour to amuse preachers, by insinuating comparisons between them and others; or, perhaps, preachers themselves may sometimes be led inadvertently to talk about the dark views, and incorrect sentiments of some of their brethren, who may differ from them. If it be asked, what is the effect of this? I answer, it tends to cherish the pride of the complainer, and to excite no small degree of self-complacency, at the thought that his light is so much clearer than that of his brethren. If it be farther inquired; Can it do any good? I fear we must answer, No. It may, however, do a great deal of harm, by disseminating prejudice, and laying a foundation for jealousy and animosity. The animadversions that have been made, are apt to make all those to whom they have been communicated, hear the preachers to whom they refer, with suspicion and prejudice. In this way, they are apt to injure their usefulness. But it frequently happens, that, through the malignity or imprudence of some one, such animadversions reach the ears of these preachers themselves, and in such a case the pernicious effects that must be produced on their minds are so obvious as to need no commentary. But

surely a hint here is sufficient. Every one must see, that the practice alluded to is altogether indefensible; and though, in an unguarded moment, any man may be betrayed into it, the more he considers it, the more strongly must he be convinced of the deep obligation under which he lies at all times, most carefully to avoid it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EVIL OF PUBLIC TEACHERS FORMING RASH AND IMPROPER CONNEXIONS IN LIFE.

PREACHERS and pastors ought to be especially careful against forming rash and hasty connexions in marriage. It is well known, that, among all sects, young men employed in preaching the Gospel, or during the time they are prosecuting their studies with the prospect of being so engaged, often, by a foolish step in this way, greatly contribute to hurt their future usefulness. Some, by paying particular attentions to young women, have led them to suppose that they really intended to ask them in marriage, when they were placed in a situation where they could do so with propriety. Such persons, when they had it in their power to marry, have paid their addresses to others. The folly, however, (I fear in many cases we must add, the criminality,) with which they were thus chargeable, has usually

been followed with its own punishment. Their comfort has been greatly marred by the consciousness of having most unguardedly trifled with the affections of one whom they had every reason to esteem; and their usefulness has been impaired, by the story of such an attachment going abroad, while, perhaps, in the course of its circulation, many circumstances of aggravation are added, to establish the charge of cruelty and unfaithfulness.

It seems very plainly to be the duty of all Christians, when they marry, from what the Apostle says, 1 Cor. 7:39, to marry only in the Lord. But, if all are called to attend to this, it certainly is, in a special manner, incumbent on those occupying more public situations in the churches of Christ, in this respect as well as others, to be ensamples to the flock. Let such, then, never think of forming a connexion with any one, of whose Christianity they have not the most satisfactory evidence. But, even where this command is not violated, the less they think about any connexion of this nature, till they be placed in a situation where they can form it with propriety, so much the better. Let them especially guard against any language, even to a Christian woman, which can be fairly construed as expressive of peculiar partiality, where they have no such meaning; and where they are engaged to one of this description, let them at once dismiss from their minds the thought of every other.

This hint need not indeed be confined to those engaged in study, or to preachers. It is equally applicable to all who profess to be the disciples of Jesus. The criminality of trifling with such engage-

ments, as those alluded to, or with female affections, is so obvious, as to need no illustration. No one who attends to our Lord's short but simple rule, to do to others as we would that others should do to us, can fail to see that it is directly violated by such a conduct.

Perhaps one of the best means that can be recommended to guard young men against entering into foolish engagements of this nature, is, their having their time and attention much devoted to study, or, when called to public labour, their being extensively employed in public usefulness. It often happens, that it is such as discover no great ardour, either in mental improvement, or active exertion, but are disposed to spend much of their time in lounging and gossiping, in a listless state of mind, in tea parties, and trifling reading, who become involved in the difficulties that have been described.

I shall here add to these remarks on the evil of ministers forming rash and improper connexions in life, the following excellent observations of Mr. Booth, on the line of conduct they ought to pursue after the matrimonial connexion is formed. "As it is of high importance for a young minister in single life, to behave with the utmost delicacy in all his intercourse with female friends, treating with peculiar caution those of them that are unmarried; and as it behoves him to pay the most conscientious regard to religious character, when choosing a companion for life; so, when in the conjugal state, his tenderest attention is due to the domestic happiness and the spiritual interests of his wife. Next, after your own soul, therefore, your wife and your chil-

dren evidently claim the most affectionate, conscientious, and pious care.

“Nor can it be reasonably doubted, that many a devout and amiable woman has given her hand to a minister of the Gospel, in preference to a private Christian, though otherwise equally deserving; in sanguine expectation, by so doing, of enjoying peculiar spiritual advantages in the matrimonial relation. But, alas! there is much reason to apprehend, that not a few individuals among these worthy females, have often reflected to the following effect:

“‘I have, indeed, married a preacher of the Gospel; but I do not find in him the affectionate domestic instructor, for either myself or my children. My husband is much esteemed among his religious acquaintance, as a respectable, Christian character; but his example at home is far from being delightful. Affable, condescending, and pleasing, in the parlors of religious friends; but, frequently, either trifling and unsavoury, or imperious and unsocial in his own family. Preferring the opportunity of being entertained at a plentiful table, and of conversing with the wealthy, the polite, and the sprightly, to the homely fare of his own family, and the company of his wife and children, he often spends his afternoons and evenings from home, until so late an hour, that domestic worship is either omitted, or performed in a hasty and slovenly manner, with scarcely the appearance of devotion. Little caring for my soul, or for the management of our growing offspring, he seems concerned for hardly any thing more, than keeping fair with his people; relative to which, I have often calmly remonstrated, and submissively entreated,

but all in vain. Surrounded with little ones, and attended with straits; destitute of the sympathies, the instructions, the consolations, which might have been expected from the affectionate heart of a pious husband, connected with the gifts of an evangelical minister; I pour out my soul to God, and mourn in secret.' Such, there is ground of apprehension, has been the sorrowful soliloquy of many a minister's pious, dutiful, and prudent wife. Take heed, then, to the best interests of your SECOND-SELF.

"To this end, except on extraordinary occasions, when impelled by duty, SPEND YOUR EVENINGS AT HOME. Yes, and at an early hour in the evening, let your family and your study receive their demands on your presence, in the lively performance of social and secret devotion. Thus, there will be reason to hope, that domestic order and sociability, the improvement of your own understanding, and communion with God, will all be promoted.

"Guard habitually against every appearance of imprudent intercourse, and every indelicate familiarity, with the most virtuous and pious of your female friends. Be particularly cautious of paying frequent visits to any single woman who lives alone, otherwise your conduct may soon fall under the suspicion of your neighbours, and also of your own wife, so as to become her daily tormentor, even while she believes you innocent of the great transgression. — In cases of this kind, it is not sufficient that conscience bears witness to the purity of your conduct, and the piety of your motives; for, in matters of such a delicate nature, there should not be the least shadow of a ground, either to support sus-

picion, or to excite surmise. There is need for us to watch and pray against the greatest sins—even against those to which, perhaps, we never perceived ourselves to be much inclined. For, alas! we have sometimes heard of apparently pious and evangelical ministers falling into such enormous crimes, as not only disgrace religion, but degrade humanity.

“Of late, I have been much affected with the following reflection: ‘Though, if not greatly deceived, I have had some degree of experimental acquaintance with Jesus Christ for almost forty years; though I have borne the ministerial character for upwards of twenty-five years; though I have been, perhaps, of some little use in the church of God; and though I have had a greater share of esteem among religious people than I had any reason to expect; yet, after all, it is possible for me, in one single hour of temptation, to blast my character—to ruin my public usefulness—and to render my warmest Christian friends ashamed of owning me. ‘Hold thou me up, O Lord, and I shall be safe!’ Ah! there is little reason for any of us to be high-minded; and, therefore, ‘Happy is the man that feareth always.’”

CHAPTER X.

ON DIFFERENT MODES OF PREACHING.

THERE are three ways of preaching, said a well-known, public character. There is, first, preaching *before* people, where the minister fixes his eye on a pillar perhaps, or some other part of the building, and seems merely delivering a harangue in the presence of the audience. There is, secondly, preaching *at* people. This takes place when the preacher has heard something improper, during the week, in the conduct of some of his hearers, which he has treasured up for the Sabbath, when he means to keep such individuals in his eye, and to have what is called a *hit* at them, on account of this offence or impropriety. There is a third way of preaching, which may be compared to getting hold of a man by the button of his coat, and endeavouring, with eagerness in your look, and affection in your manner, to convince him that you have an important piece of business to talk to him about, in which he himself is so deeply interested, that you can on no account let him go till he listen to you. Were we to ask, which of these modes of preaching is the best, and ought to be cultivated, no one, we imagine, would be at a loss for an answer.

Young preachers, who are forcibly struck with the inconsistencies that appear in the views or conduct of some professors, are apt, from their little acquaint-

ance with human nature, and not calculating on the strength of prejudice, and the influence of education, to think, that strongly pointing out such inconsistencies is all that is necessary for the removal of them. In this way, they sometimes fall into the second of those modes of preaching above noticed, —preaching *at* people. But this seldom or never succeeds. With whatever point it is done, however much some may admire the cleverness with which the errors of this, or the other party or individual, are delineated, it in general only tends to rouse prejudice, and injure a preacher's usefulness. It is not in this way prejudice is to be overcome. Give a man correct views of divine truth, and these will in their natural, though it may be, very gradual operation, undermine whatever is opposed to them. Satire may check the flippant follies of the age, by exposing them to ridicule. This is all it has in view. It merely regards external manners. A radical change of sentiment is confessedly beyond its reach, and of course does not come within its aim. But it is only by calm reasoning, and affectionate expostulation, not by a sneer, that a man's false views are to be corrected in what relates to eternity. The subject is so awfully important, that there is something incongruous in speaking of it in a tone that even borders on levity. I have known a man of plain talents, who spoke with simplicity and affection, collect a considerable audience, where one of very superior acquirements, who was accustomed to indulge a vein of sarcasm against the inconsistencies of those he addressed, could get comparatively few to hear him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PASTORS GUARDING AGAINST
PARTIALITY.

It is an apostolic precept, that, in the churches of the saints, nothing should be done by partiality. Not only should this precept be carefully observed in all the public decisions of a church, but public teachers should even, in their private intercourse, carefully guard against such an overweening attachment to certain individuals in a society, as prevents them from paying a sufficient attention to the rest.

This is, in the first place, extremely apt to be hurtful to those who are the objects of such peculiar regard. Unless their minds are much matured by experience, they are ready to become opinionative and dogmatical — to suppose that the attention they receive is owing to their superior discernment — and, of course, that they ought to have more to say in any piece of business that comes before the church, than their brethren. Others, again, it inspires with jealousy; and mutual love and confidence are thus broken.

It is particularly unhappy when this partiality is discovered towards those in superior circumstances in life, especially if there appear nothing in their Christian character fitted to inspire peculiar esteem. The appearance of this should be carefully guarded

against. It almost unavoidably begets a suspicion, that such a preference does not originate from the best of motives. Intelligent Christians, in better circumstances, ought to be sensible of this, and, for the general good, ought not to look for any such particular attentions, but rather to discourage them, knowing how much they are apt to excite the jealousy of brethren in inferior stations, and thus to mar a minister's usefulness. We should "abstain from all appearance of evil," and be concerned not to "let our good be evil spoken of." In this way, it is perhaps better, than what persons of greater opulence contribute to the support of the Gospel, should be put into a general collection, than given in a separate way. Whatever may appear a temptation to partiality, ought to be carefully avoided.

There is much knowledge of the human heart, as well as accurate observation of the world, in the following remarks of Mr. Booth on this subject; "What is it but a detestable pride, that makes any of us ministers take more pleasure in perceiving our labours made useful to the rich, the learned, and the polite, than to the poor, the illiterate, and the vulgar? It is, I presume, principally, because it adds consequence to our own characters, to have wealthy, well-educated, and polished persons in our churches. Jesus, however, in the time of his personal ministry, was far from being influenced by any such motive; and equally far from showing the least predilection for persons of promising dispositions, on any such grounds. Witness his behaviour to Nicodemus, to the young ruler, and to the nobleman at Capernaum. John 3:1—12. Mark 10:17—22. John 4:46—50.

"I will add, what is it but the same depravity of heart, which frequently renders us much more attentive to our wealthy friends, than we are to our poor brethren, in times of affliction? Even though we be well assured, that there is little danger of the rich being overlooked in their sorrows. Hoary as I now am in the ministry, and accustomed as I have been to hear conscience cry out against me, for this, that, and the other omission of duty, I do not recollect that it ever charged me with neglecting any person in plentiful circumstances, when deeply afflicted, and requesting my visits. But, alas! I do recollect having frequently heard conscience, with a frowning aspect, and an angry tone, either demanding, 'Wouldst thou be thus backward to undergo some little inconvenience in visiting a wealthy patient?' or declaring, 'That afflicted brother would not, through mere forgetfulness, have been recently disappointed of thy presence, conversation, and prayers, had he not been an obscure and a poor man. Had he been less deserving of thy compassionate regard, he would have been favoured with it.' Alas, my brother, there is reason to fear, that few ministers, on this ground, stand perfectly free from censure, at the bar of a tender conscience!"

If any kind of preference of one person to another in churches is lawful, it is that which arises from the superior manifestation of the influence of the Gospel, in a man's character, whatever be the station of life in which he is found. Where marks of particular regard are regulated by this principle, there is little risk of their producing the bad consequences that have been mentioned. We are to love

the brethren for the truth's sake that dwelleth in them; and if this is the ground of our special love to them, it seems to be a fair inference, that the measure of this love ought to be regulated by the degree in which this truth manifestly influences them. If the image of Jesus is that which ought to excite my affection, does it not fairly follow, that my attachment should be greatest to that representation which most nearly approaches the perfect original?

It is, at the same time, necessary to add a caution to the members of churches, against rashly judging of their public teachers, from the circumstance of their being more in the company of some than of others. Different things ought to be taken into the account here. Some members of churches have more leisure than others, and in this way have it more in their power to spend a little time in conversation. It is usually the same persons, too, whose minds are more cultivated with reading, than those whose time is necessarily occupied with daily labour, and this of course makes their conversation more useful. These, and similar circumstances, ought to be considered as affording sufficient reason for a pastor spending more of his leisure hours with one class than another. The object of the preceding hints to public teachers, on this subject, is, that the attention paid to a few may not interfere with the duty they owe to all. If this duty is not neglected, in consequence of the time that is spent with a few, no one is entitled to find fault.

CHAPTER XII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A BISHOP NOT BEING SOON ANGRY.

AMONG the various qualities mentioned by Paul, as necessary in the character of a bishop, (or elder, or pastor, as all these expressions in Scripture plainly denote the same thing,) one is, that he must not be soon angry. This quality will be found essentially requisite, wherever the business of a church is conducted on Scriptural principles. It seems manifest, that a conviction, on the part of the members, that any act of public discipline that takes place is agreeable to the mind of Christ, is absolutely necessary to their spiritual obedience. This conviction ought to be produced by the perspicuity with which the pastor applies the law to the case in question; and where this is clearly done, there is no room for any discussion on the subject. May I not add, that the more this is prevented by the clear statement and application of the law of Christ, so much the better?

Objections, however, may be sometimes started, of a very weak or trifling nature, merely from want of discernment, and these the pastor should patiently endeavour to remove. Cases, in like manner, may occur, which may tend to excite the irritability of some of the members. In such situations, it is of

the utmost importance that a pastor be perfectly composed, and keep completely free of any irritation, which others may discover. If he should give way to it, it might have the most pernicious effect on the general body, as it might form a sort of apology to others for any strong language they should adopt. If, on the other hand, he act with firmness and mildness, cautioning the brethren against the first appearance of an improper spirit, I have never seen it fail to check what might be in any measure unseemly, and to preserve the most perfect order and decorum.

We have a fine model for pastors, in the example of the Apostle Paul, in his intercourse with the Galatian churches. The treatment he met with from these churches, was in a high degree calculated to excite his resentment. When he first went among them, as he tells them, they would have plucked out their own eyes, and given them to him! Gal. 4:15.; and yet, by the insinuations of false teachers, they soon manifested the very opposite spirit. But, what is the Apostle's object in the epistle he writes to them? It is, that they may not be led away from the simplicity of the Gospel; that their souls may be saved. If this object can be attained, he seems quite willing to lose sight of any personal injury they had done to himself. Amidst all their ingratitude, the only satisfaction he aims at, is, that he may have the comfort of thinking he had not run in vain, but that they should be reclaimed from their errors, and afterwards walk steadfastly in the good ways of the Lord.

In the patience, long-suffering, and forbearance

with which the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls bore, while on earth, with the slowness of understanding, and the remaining imperfections and prejudices of his followers, we have a still higher model for our imitation. Let every pastor have such examples invariably in his view. In his character ought to be combined the most perfect self-possession under contradiction and opposition, or whatever is calculated to tease, to inflame, or to discourage, with the most lively sensibility to the eternal interests of the souls of men. In short, the glory of his divine Master, and the salvation of men, ought to appear objects so important in his estimation, that every personal interest and feeling ought to be completely forgotten, if these grand objects may be but effectually secured, and extensively promoted.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE PROPER STATE OF MIND UNDER MINISTERIAL SUCCESS OR DISCOURAGEMENTS.

SHOULD a large degree of apparent success, (says the venerable author, already repeatedly quoted in these pages) through the favour of Heaven, accompany your labours; there will be the highest necessity to guard against pride and self-esteem. A young man, of good ministerial abilities, and honoured with great usefulness, is in a delicate situation,

respecting the prosperity of his own soul: for, through the want of experience and observation, such concurrence of pleasing particulars has proved, to some very promising characters, the innocent occasion of disgrace and ruin. Shining abilities, and a blessing upon their labours, have rendered them popular. Popularity has intoxicated them with pride. Pride has exposed them to various temptations. Temptations have prevailed; and either precipitated them into some enormous offence, or laid the foundation of a gradual departure from the truth, and from the practice of real piety. If the former, their character has been killed, as by the stroke of an apoplexy. If the latter, their comfort and usefulness have been destroyed, as by a consuming hectic.* Agreeably to that saying, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Remember, therefore, my brother, that though it is your indispensable duty to labour and pray for prosperity in your work; yet, that a season of remarkable success will generally prove an hour of peculiar temptation to your own soul. *Take heed to yourself*, at such a time, and watch the secret motions of your own heart. The number of your hearers may increase, and your church may flourish; while, in your own breast, devotional affections, and virtuous dispositions are greatly on the decline; nor need I inform you, that every degree of such declension has a tendency to final ruin.

Besides, if there should be an appearance of ex-

* "Si minister verbi laudatur, versatur in periculo," says the famous AUGUSTINE,

tensive utility attending your labours, for which I sincerely pray, you may do well to remember the old proverb, "All is not gold that glitters." Numbers there are that seem to "receive the word with joy," who, "in time of temptation, fall away." Many evangelical and popular preachers, I am very suspicious, have greatly over-rated the usefulness of their own labours. For, the longer I live, the more apprehensive I am, that the number of *real* converts among those who profess the genuine Gospel, is comparatively very small: according to the import of that alarming declaration, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

On the other hand, should you meet *with many and great discouragements*, take heed that you do not indulge a desponding temper, as if you had been of no use in the ministerial work. With discouragements you certainly will meet, unless Providence were to make your case an exception to the general course of things; which you have no ground to expect. Very painful discouragements, for instance, may sometimes arise, from the want of liberty and savour in your own mind, when performing public service. This, there is reason to suppose, is not uncommon. I, at least, have had frequent experience of it; and, once, to such a degree, that I began to think very seriously of giving up the ministry: supposing that the Great Shepherd had nothing farther for me to do, either in the pastoral office, or in preaching the word at large. This exercise of mind, though exceedingly painful for some weeks, was both instructive and useful. Before that well-recollected season, I had frequently *talked* about the

necessity of divine influence, to render a minister savoury in his own mind, as well as profitable to others; but then I FELT it.

Be not discouraged, then, "as though some strange thing happened unto you," that never befel a real minister of Christ; if a similar trial should occur in the course of your ministry. For it may be to you, as I trust it was to me, of no inconsiderable benefit: because I reckon, that whatever curbs our pride, makes us feel our insufficiency, and sends us to the throne of grace, is at least the occasion of doing us good. Seldom, alas! have I found any remarkable degree of savour, and of enlargement in public service, without experiencing more or less of self-elatement and self-gratulation on that account. Instead of complaining, therefore, that I have not more liberty in my work, nor more success attending the performance of it; I have reason to wonder at the condescending kindness of God, in that he gives to my extremely imperfect labours, the least saving effect, and that he does not frequently leave me to be confounded before all my hearers. Such, brother, have been the feelings and reasonings of my own mind, and such my confessions before God, many a time.

"It is not unlikely that, in a course of years, some of your people, who had expressed a warm regard to your ministry, and perhaps considered you as their spiritual father, may become, without any just reason, your violent opposers, asperse your ministerial character, and wish to be rid of you. This, though very trying, is far from an unexampled case: no, not with regard to much greater men, and far

better ministers, than either of us. Witness the language of Paul, in various parts of his two epistles to the church at Corinth, and in his letter to the Galatian churches. Witness also the life of that excellent man, Rev. President EDWARDS, of New-England.

“Among the dissatisfied, it is probable, some will complain of your ministry being dry, legal, and of an Arminian cast; while others, it may be, will quarrel with it, under a supposition, that you dwell too much on the doctrines of divine grace, and verge toward Antinomianism. My own ministry, however, has been the subject of loud complaint, in these opposite ways, and that at the very same time. Nor have we much reason to wonder at it. For if a minister, to the best of his ability, display the glory of sovereign grace, in the election, redemption, and justification of sinners; he will be sure to offend the pride of multitudes, who are seeking acceptance with God by their own obedience. Persons of this character will probably draw the same inferences from his doctrine, and form the same objections against it, as those by which the ministry of Paul was opposed. “If it be so,” they will cry, “why does God yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will? Let us do evil that good may come; and continue in sin, that grace may abound. The law is made void, and personal holiness is quite superfluous.”

“Does the same preacher insist upon the necessity of that ‘holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord’—upon that conformity to the example of Christ, and that spiritual mindedness, without which

all pretensions to faith in the Son of God are vain? the covetousness and carnality of others will be disgusted. They will pronounce him legal, and consider his doctrine as inimical to the prerogatives of sovereign grace: and this, because he maintains, that evangelical truths have a holy influence on all who believe them; or, in the language of James, 'that faith without works is dead.'

"Again; you may, it is highly probable, have painful opportunities of observing, that, while some of your people embrace pernicious doctrines, verge to wide extremes, and are exceedingly desirous of making proselytes to their novel peculiarities, others of them are giddy and flighty, rambling about from one place of worship to another, admiring almost every fresh preacher they hear; but quite dissatisfied with your ministry, though they hardly know for what. Nor is there any reason to doubt, that others, among the objects of your pastoral care, will administer occasions of grief, by formality and lukewarmness in their profession; by their pride, extravagance, or sensuality; by their envy, avarice, or injustice; or, finally, by malevolent attacks, in unfounded charges upon your own character; as in the case of Paul, among the Corinthians. You must guard, however, against desponding discouragement, when any of these painful particulars occur to your notice. Nay, should a variety of them appear at the same time, you must not conclude that God has deserted your ministry, and entirely forsaken your church. But, while firmly determined to promote the exercise of strict and impartial discipline; and while careful, except the case be quite peculiar,

never to bring the bad conduct of any individual into your public discourses; examine your own ways—humble yourself before God—increase your pastoral exertions—cry mightily to the Father of mercies for assistance—endeavour, as it were, to *levy a tax* upon these trials; that they may, at least, afford private advantage to your own soul—and, then, leaving your cause with God, ‘be of good courage.’ ”

CHAPTER XIV.

HINTS TO PUBLIC TEACHERS, IN REMARKS ON
ISAIAH 9:16.

It is a very awful charge that is brought against false teachers of old, when it is said, Isaiah 9:16 “The leaders of this people cause them to err, and they that are led of them are destroyed.” There are various ways in which those who profess to be public teachers may be chargeable with this guilt.

They may *first* cause men to err, by false doctrine. This was the case with the Judaizing teachers, in the churches of Galatia. They preached another Gospel, as Paul expresses it. When we read the solemn curse, which the Apostle, under the influence of inspiration, denounces upon such; surely all who occupy the situation of public teachers, ought to tremble at the thought of preaching any thing else than the unadulterated Gospel of Christ,

Secondly, Preachers may cause men to err, by not fully bringing forward the truth. There are many of whom you cannot say, they state what is directly wrong ; but there is a great deficiency, a want of a full and explicit representation of the most important parts of revealed truth. It is not enough that preachers do not bring forward what is directly false ; their hearers have a right to expect from them, that nothing profitable shall be kept back, nay, that while they declare, so far as they know it, the whole counsel of God, they chiefly dwell on those truths which hold the most distinguished place in the revelation of mercy.

Thirdly, How much open immorality in public teachers, leads men to err, has often been the subject of animadversion. It is a remark in the mouth of almost every one ; and how far it has contributed to make many a poor, thoughtless creature, who either was incapable of looking beyond the surface of things, or would not take the trouble to do so, conclude, that religion was all a trick of priestcraft, it is impossible to calculate. But on this it is unnecessary here to dwell, as, however such characters may be allowed to remain in those societies where there is a manifest union of the church and the world, we cannot suppose them at all tolerated by a church, professing to be solely influenced by the authority of Christ.

But there is a *fourth* way of disseminating error, on the part of public teachers, which is, I believe, more dangerous than even open immorality. I allude to those cases where external decency and propriety of conduct are associated with a general

carelessness and a conformity to the maxims and manners of the world. This has a most extensively pernicious influence. When a man is grossly immoral, others can scarcely be supposed to be deceived by him. His character is too manifest. Every one must see, that, if there is any thing in Christianity at all, such a man is confessedly wrong. Nay, that he is chargeable with the vilest hypocrisy, in assuming the character of a public teacher, as he can be influenced by no other motive than the worldly emolument of the office with which he is invested. But suppose a man, amiable in his temper, gentle in his habits, decorous in his manners, with a mixture of truth in his discourses, while at the same time he is a stranger to vital godliness, having never seen the absolute necessity of the salvation of the Gospel, nor experienced that radical change of principle, which the belief of it produces; it is impossible to say, how much such a character is calculated to mislead and ruin souls. His conduct tends to make men substitute something in the room of Christianity, which is essentially different from it. But it is an imitation of it, and the closer the imitation, if it really be a counterfeit, the better it is fitted to mislead and deceive.

The influence arising from the private intercourse, as well as public teaching, of such characters, is calculated to give quite false views of the radical difference between the spirit of the Gospel, and the spirit even of the decent and sober part of the world. It tends to draw a veil over the peculiar doctrines of the word of God, and not only to obscure their glory, but to exclude from the mind

every impression that the knowledge and belief of them is essentially necessary to our acceptance in the sight of God. It tends to diffuse a prejudice against the scriptural standard of Christian obedience; to annihilate that invariable regard to Christian principle, in all that we do, which the Apostles of our Lord so uniformly inculcate; and thus to fritter down those distinctions which they so constantly maintain. It has the awful tendency to make men imagine, that if they have a tolerably correct deportment in passing through life, it is enough, and that in this way all is safe for eternity,—one of the most dangerous errors that can possibly occupy the human mind.

Many examples are to be met with, of the melancholy influence of such public teachers, where the inhabitants of whole districts are laid asleep under the most fatal delusion, and are steeled against every attempt to direct their attention to the Christianity of the word of God. Surely the thought of this, in connexion with the awful responsibility of such as contribute to make men rest their future hopes on a false foundation, is calculated to excite, in those who profess to teach others, much watchfulness and prayer, and to lead them carefully to draw their instructions from the pure fountain of divine truth. Let them examine, with minute attention, the light in which things are represented in the Scriptures, and let their discourses be a faithful copy of what is there contained. But it may be useful also to remind those who attend the ministry of such, that whatever guilt is contracted by public teachers, it will not remove that of their hearers, if

they should be misled by them, while they have the inspired standard in their hands, to which they should ever appeal.

We shall only add, that neglecting the discipline of the house of God, is a *fifth* way in which teachers may cause men to err. This discipline is a means appointed by the great Head of the church for preserving men from self-deception, correcting the errors of his people, and exhibiting to the world the genuine spirit and tendency of his Gospel, and the character of his kingdom. It is sufficiently apparent, that each of these ends are to a certain degree frustrated, where his appointments on this subject are disregarded.

The Apostle Paul expressly declares, under the influence of the Spirit of prophecy, that “in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” And after giving this description of character, he adds, as an injunction plainly binding on the disciples of Christ, and recorded for their direction in these last days, — “*from such turn away.*”

The first thing that deserves our notice in this passage, is the peculiarity of character here mentioned, as what was to distinguish the last days. All the features of human depravity contained in the first part of this description, have existed in

every age ; but the peculiarity here is, that, at the period referred to, these should be found associated with a form of godliness.

This prediction was certainly fulfilled when Christianity became the professed religion of the Roman empire, when persons of all descriptions assumed the profession of the Christian faith. It is obvious that there must always be many of the same character, wherever Christianity is a national religion. But let no one suppose, that such characters are only to be found in those churches which are avowedly in connexion with the State. Many of them, it is to be feared, may be met with in societies which have professed, on Christian principles, to separate from these.

I know it is often used as an apology for the neglect of this part of Christian discipline, that it is extremely difficult to draw the line ; that, though you see deficiencies in many characters, it would be hard, it would be uncharitable, to say that such characters have a mere form of godliness, but deny the power of it. To this I reply, that though, in some cases, this difficulty may exist, it will be admitted that there are many in which it does not ; in which, if we apply the plain rule of Scripture, that of judging of men's characters by their works, it will be found that such persons practically deny the power of godliness, though they assume its form. Let the disciples of Christ, then, obey this command, — " From such turn away," where the case is clear ; and we have no doubt that the supposed cases of difficulty will be found to be greatly diminished, if not entirely to disappear. The simple question here

is, Was this precept given to be obeyed? If so, all the reasoning from the supposed difficulty of obeying it, and which is often used as an apology for neglecting it altogether, can be considered in no other light than as involving a reflection on the wisdom of the Lawgiver.

With regard to the charge which is often brought forward here, of judging *uncharitably*, I cannot but notice how grossly, in this case, this term is perverted. If charity means *love*, (which is plainly the scriptural import of the expression,) we discover the most genuine exercise of this Christian principle, when, by our conduct towards others, we guard them as far as possible against self-deception, in what relates to their eternal interests; and we are, on the other hand, chargeable with the most fearful violation of it, if, by neglecting a plain command of the Apostles of Christ, we contribute to administer to that deception.

It is surely too far on in the day now to be told, that we cannot judge the heart, and that it is in vain that we look for any perfect society on earth. These are unquestionable truths, but have no connexion with the present argument. No one pretends to judge the heart, but we judge of men's characters by their conduct; and, in doing so, we are only complying with the command of the Lord Jesus, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Again, though we do not look for a perfect society on earth, it would be a very strange inference from this to say, therefore the appointed discipline of the house of God ought to be disregarded. But unless this is intended to be inferred, for what purpose is this ob-

jection introduced? We know that *it is possible*, even in this world of imperfection, to find societies of professing Christians, where it cannot be said that any are walking in manifest inconsistency with their Christian profession, and in which the discipline appointed by the Lord Jesus is observed when any do so. This is all for which we contend. Though hypocrites should afterwards be discovered, no blame can be attached to the society on account of such characters existing among them, before their hypocrisy was detected; nor afterwards, if they are treated as the word of God enjoins, after that hypocrisy is made manifest.

I cannot conclude this chapter, without noticing a deception under which I have often found many private Christians labour. Repeatedly have I heard such acknowledge, that they would indeed feel very great difficulty, if called to act as public teachers, from the very questionable character of many whom they admit to religious ordinances; but they comfort themselves with the thought, that they are involved in no such responsibility.

This is, in the first place, founded on very false views of Christian communion. When professing Christians sit down together at the table of the Lord, surely the avowed import of the service is, that they not only *remember* the death of Jesus, but that they *commemorate* it. Thus, it is a *communion*; it is a social act; they remember this event *together*; they professedly have a *mutual* interest in it. As this is involved in the very nature of the institution, no one who has a proper view of this ordinance, and respects the authority of the Institutor, can be justi-

fied in saying he has nothing to do, when seated at the table of the Lord, with the character of those around him; he does not profess to treat them as Christian brethren.

To put this argument in another form,—Let us suppose, for a moment, Paul had visited Corinth a short time after he wrote his first epistle to the church planted in that city, and that he found among them the person mentioned in chap. 5, or any others of such a description of character as he there commands to be put away. Let us further suppose him conversing with one of the members of the church, and inquiring why this irregularity was permitted. You may conceive this individual answering, “It is very true, such characters are still among us; your command is not obeyed, but it is no concern of mine. The pastors should have attended to this; and if they neglect it, on themselves is the sin.” How do you think this apology would have been sustained? I can imagine the venerable man calling for the letter he had written to them, and in the tone of apostolic authority, and with an apostolic frown sitting upon his brows, reading the first part of it—“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, unto the *church of God* which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.” He would no doubt here remind him, that it was to the *church at large*, the body of believers, that this command was given; that every one was interested in seeing it obeyed; and that no one could be considered as free from blame, who, by the influence of his example, countenanced what he was convinced

was a plain violation of the authority of an Apostle of Christ.

I would not be understood, by this language, to undervalue the pastoral office. No! It is expressly a divine appointment; and a distinct conception, on the part of pastors, of the duties of that office, and, on the part of the people, of that power of ruling with which pastors are invested, stands intimately connected with the prosperity of the churches. At the same time, it cannot be denied, and no one should wish to conceal it, that, in the apostolic epistles, it is to the *general body of the believers*, in connexion with their bishops and deacons, that the charge is committed, of seeing that the commands enjoined in these epistles be obeyed; and it is on this plain and unquestionable ground that we hold the responsibility of that general body, if these commands are disregarded.

If it be said, that in certain societies things are in that state that these commands cannot be obeyed, this is the most explicit declaration of the unscriptural character of any society to which this remark can be applied. The gross evils in the church of Corinth are often referred to as an apology for impure communion. But gross as these were, the church was in that situation that it *could* and *did* correct them, when they received the apostolic command to do so. It is surely then undeniable, that there must be something radically wrong, when this command, though clearly given, and distinctly understood, cannot be obeyed.

Let none of my Christian brethren be offended at these remarks: let them not be stigmatized as the

language of party spirit. No: they are submitted to the attention of all who reverence the authority of the word of God, and profess to act on the truly Protestant principle, that it is in the *Bible* their religion is to be found. They are submitted to their attention, from a full conviction, more and more confirmed by every day's observation, that the promiscuous admission of persons of all descriptions to the peculiar ordinances of Christianity, tends to deceive and ruin the souls of thousands. The great day of trial alone will discover the multitudes who have been lulled asleep in the most false and fatal security, by being thus treated as disciples of Christ, who, by a different treatment, might have been awakened to a sense of their danger, and led to flee for refuge to the hope set before them. Who would not tremble at the thought of having any share, nay even the most indirect influence, in administering to such a delusion?

Let every one, then, who professes to be a disciple of Christ, remember that he has his own measure of influence; and whatever that be, however limited, he is accountable for the manner in which he employs it. We all move in our own little circles. In our progress round these, we come into contact with others. Let every one be concerned, that, in whatever point his influence thus touches, the tendency of that touch shall be a beneficial one; fitted to do good, never to do evil.

Christians may certainly differ in sentiment on some points, after deliberate inquiry; and we rejoice in the increasing union that is found to exist among them in the present day, notwithstanding these dif-

ferences. But all that I here ask is, that, in the language of an eloquent advocate for Christianity of the present day, "the principle of 'what thinkest thou?' be exploded, and that of 'what readest thou?' be substituted in its place; that every opinion in religion should be reduced to this question, and the Bible be acquiesced in and submitted to as the alone directory of our faith, where we can get the whole will of God for the salvation of man."* Under the influence of this principle, then, let every one carefully examine the word of God for himself, and, as much as possible unbiassed by any human authority, conscientiously follow what he conceives to be its dictates, in the prospect of the second coming of the Lord.

* Dr. Chalmers on the Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation.

PART FOURTH.

REMARKS ON MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUTY OF EMBRACING EVERY OPPORTUNITY
OF DOING GOOD.

WHEN we consider the extreme uncertainty of our abode on earth ; that it is the only period of our immortal existence in which it will be possible for us to promote the spiritual good of a careless world ; and that, at last, we must give an account of the improvement we have made of every talent of usefulness with which we have been entrusted ; we ought to be habitually on the watch, to avail ourselves of every opportunity of doing good ; of turning to some useful account our intercourse with those around us. We know not when those who have never made any profession of Christianity, may feel a desire to have their attention directed to subjects of a religious nature. I knew a young man, gay and thoughtless, who was intentionally left by a pious relative alone, for half an hour, in a room with a Christian friend. This relative had not, indeed, hinted his design to this friend ; but he

counted upon his embracing the opportunity thus afforded, of introducing something that was useful. He, on the other hand, thought that he would rather suit his conversation to his company; and, to the great disappointment of the young man, talked all the while on indifferent subjects.

We know not how far certain serious thoughts may be, at particular seasons, passing through a man's mind, whose general character may be of quite a different description. Every man, we believe, has his reflecting moments, and we have no doubt there is something often secretly working within, very different from what external appearances would indicate. In the midst of apparent gaiety, there is often a deep-felt want of inward satisfaction, and a secret suspicion, if it amount to nothing more, that all is not right. This has often been acknowledged afterwards, by those who have been led to serious reflection, though, at the time, no one would have suspected them of any such secret uneasiness.

In endeavouring, indeed, to introduce what is useful, we are apt to be repelled by the mortifying disappointments we must often meet with. Perhaps we shall find, that what is hinted from the purest motives is treated with total indifference, if not with ridicule and contempt. But such disappointments must not discourage us. When we meet with a stranger, it is always worth while, at least, to attempt to suggest something that is calculated to do good. The manner in which it is received, will very soon discover the tone of sentiment of those with whom we may be called, for the season, to associate. If a useful sentiment that is dropped should be

treated with silence, or with open and avowed aversion, it is a consolation to think it may perhaps be recollected afterwards, under more favourable impressions. But, as a counterbalance for frequent mortifications and disappointments, we may frequently be surprised by the most pleasing discoveries, or perceive the happiest effects produced. A stranger, into whose society we have been thrown, apparently in the most incidental manner, may be found either one who is a believer of the Gospel, or one who is disposed to listen, with some measure of candor and attention, to the important principles it contains.

In like manner, we ought never to despair of any one, so as to be induced to neglect such opportunities as may occur, of endeavouring to promote his spiritual profit. As the state of men's minds is often affected by circumstances altogether unknown to us, even though we might be discouraged by a knowledge of their general habits and character, they may be more disposed to listen to us at one time than at another, without our being able to assign a particular reason for it.

I have often thought how that eminent servant of Christ, the Apostle Paul, would conduct himself on any occasional intercourse he held with strangers. Such was the holy ardour of his mind, his zeal for the divine glory, and his melting compassion for the souls of men, that we cannot well conceive him to have been, for any length of time, in any man's company, without some discovery of his principles, some attempt to direct his attention to that Gospel which he knew to be the only way that leads to the

enjoyment of eternal life. It will not be understood, that I here exclude prudence from the catalogue of Christian graces. But what in many cases assumes the name, is not the legitimate child of Christian wisdom, but the spurious offspring of indifference. That cases of real imprudence exist, cannot be denied; but it must also be admitted, than those in which the opposite evil is exemplified, of neglecting fair opportunities of doing good, through mere indolence, are to be found in the proportion of ten, nay of an hundred fold to one.

Some friends were conversing one day about a person who, in spite of many remonstrances, and many opportunities of knowing the path of duty, seemed perfectly steeled against every proper impression, and determined to go on in his own evil courses. One of the company, who, before he knew the Gospel, had gone to great excess in wickedness himself, remarked, that he saw no necessity for his friends troubling themselves any farther with such a character. If he had an opportunity of knowing the truth, and would not attend to it, let him take the consequences. A lady sitting by, who knew this person's history, gently reminded him, Ah! Mr. —, what might have been your state to-day, if others had argued thus in regard to you? The reproof was just, and I believe it was felt. He had himself been indebted to the affectionate and persevering assiduities of a Christian friend, as the means, under the blessing of God, of leading his attention to the revelation of divine mercy.

It is a quaint remark, but a just one, that while there is life there is hope. While much prudence

then is necessary, in regulating our attempts to promote the spiritual profit of those around us, we may surely say, that, whatever degree of hope there may be, while there is life, we ought incessantly to watch every favourable opportunity of suggesting whatever seems fitted to promote their eternal good. And when we think in how many instances characters the most unlikely are brought to stoop to the sceptre of the Prince of Peace, this very consideration should, in every case, preserve us from that despondency which would lay vigilance asleep, or relax exertion.

In speaking of men's obligations to embrace every opportunity of doing good, I cannot omit noticing a great imperfection, to give it no severer a name, which every one much conversant with the world must have observed, in characters which in many points are extremely estimable. If any new benevolent institution is to be formed, it is not enough that you show such persons, in the most satisfactory way, that such an institution is needed, that it is practicable; before you can secure their co-operation, you must give them a distinguished place in the management of it. If you thus flatter their vanity, you may secure the aid of their purse, of their patronage, and of their personal services; but unless you do so, by placing them in some prominent situation, no demonstration of the excellence of your plan, or of the claim it thus has to their support, will be of any avail.

That such characters should be found countenancing institutions merely of general benevolence, and not essentially connected with Christian princi-

ple, is less to be wondered at; but it is a melancholy proof of a radical defect in the motive by which a man is influenced, if he needs to be thus flattered to lend his aid to any institution which has for its object the diffusion of divine truth. He has surely not yet learned that maxim, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves." The man who has felt the force of this precept, will need no other inducement to secure his co-operation, than that which is derived from the manifest excellence of the institution, together with his having it in his power to give it his support. Point out to him the way in which he can be useful, and this is enough; though, in employing his talent, he should occupy the lowest room, and, like his divine Master, be as one that serves.

Under this article, I must be permitted to suggest a hint to a certain class of preachers. Do we not often find, that where preachers possess considerable powers, particularly a natural facility in public speaking, so that they can make a tolerably decent appearance, without much previous study, this very talent becomes a snare to them? By trusting to it, they come forward and deliver harangues, fluently enough no doubt, and in which there are many good things, but the materials of which are so ill arranged, that the general effect upon the audience is far inferior, in point of impression, to what they might have produced, had they, by proper care and study, employed the intellectual powers which God has given them to the best possible advantage.

Let it not be said, that we are here laying too

much stress on human means, and that it is only by the blessing of God we are to look for success. My observation is no way inconsistent with this important truth. But if means are to be used at all, let them be used in the best style, and in the way which is most likely to attain the end. If truth, stated with perspicuity and energy, is more likely to impress the mind, and to be retained in the memory, than when brought forward confusedly and feebly, I am bound to aim at this perspicuity and energy, so far as I can attain them. If it is from indolence that the addresses of a preacher have not all those qualities which are fitted to give them effect, which he could impart to them, he is criminal. Let every one employed in the glorious work of preaching the everlasting Gospel recollect, that it is not sufficient that he can make a tolerable appearance, and fairly stand a trial with most of his brethren; it is his own measure of talents, whatever that may be, of the improvement of which he must give an account. It is not enough he has made *some* use of them; it ought to be the study of every one *to improve them to the utmost.*

CHAPTER II.

ON CHRISTIANS GOING TO LAW WITH ONE
ANOTHER.

It is plainly inconsistent with the apostolic precept, for Christians to go to law with one another; though this precept, like many others, has hitherto been very little regarded. What the Apostle says on this subject, is recorded, 1 Cor. 6:1. "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know, that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not, that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If, then, ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge, who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no not one, that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now, therefore, there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another; why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?"

Of the phrase, "judges least esteemed in the church," two interpretations have been given. Some

imagine, that the Apostle here insinuates, that the business of settling disputes, respecting temporal affairs, was of such inferior magnitude, that even those who were least qualified for more important services, might be employed in it. That so far was it from being proper to go before the heathen magistrates, even the weakest of the brethren might settle these differences. Others think it ought to be read in the form of a question. "If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life," *i. e.* if ye have disputes about property among you, "do ye set them to judge, who are least esteemed in the church?" *i. e.* the heathen magistrates, who, as a church, you must esteem much less than your own brethren; and as in such cases, it is usual to appeal to those we esteem most, is it not inconsistent in you, to apply to them you esteem least?* But whether we take the one view or the other, of the meaning of this text, the criminality of Christians

* In verses 4, 5, and 6, the Apostle seems to write in the style of a delicate kind of irony; or a style which it is extremely difficult to infuse into a translation. The following paraphrase may give some idea of the view we have of the spirit of this passage. The intelligent reader will judge how far it is just.

If then ye have matters belonging to this life to decide upon, pray go and employ the weakest of the brethren to do it. I speak thus, to shame you out of your foolish conduct. What, have ye not a wise man among you; not one of discernment enough to decide between his brethren; but brother, forsooth, must go to law with brother, and that before the unjust? Here the peculiarity of style ceases, and what follows seems addressed in a more serious strain; thus. — Truly then (to speak more seriously) there is utterly a fault among you, in that ye should have lawsuits one with another. Why do ye not rather suffer wrong; why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? But, instead of acting upon this principle, rather to suffer injury than to bring reproach upon the Gospel, by showing your heathen neighbours that you cannot agree among yourselves, some of you, at least, must be chargeable with the guilt of doing unjustly, and defrauding even your brethren, whom, from being united with them in the bonds of Christianity, you are rather under a special obligation to treat with kindness, affection, and esteem.

going to law with one another, is very clearly established by it.

In stating the substance of this article to a Christian friend, who had been extensively engaged in mercantile enterprise, he remarked, that, in such a country as this, many cases might occur, respecting the interfering claims of those who are engaged in trade, which are of such a complex nature, that many members of churches are quite incapable of judging of them with propriety. They are not possessed of that information, respecting the particular branch of business to which the case refers, which qualifies them for forming a just judgment on the subject.

The observation appears extremely well founded. Such cases, no doubt, may occur. Still, however, the spirit of the Apostle's rule must be followed out, and this, we conceive, will be effectually done, where the subject in dispute is decided by arbitration. Persons of integrity, fully acquainted with the nature of the case in question, may certainly be found, and if the parties agree, in an amicable manner, to refer to them the point of difference, the object which the apostolic precept has in view is attained. If either party decline such an arbitration, he must be considered chargeable with all the scandal thrown on the Christian profession, by the legal measures, to which the other may find it necessary to resort to protect his rights. In this case, the guilt of infringing the apostolic regulation, lies on him who refuses to accede to this scriptural way of settling any differences that may take place among those who profess to be the disciples of Christ. If

this method is adopted, then, the mutual love and confidence of the parties is not violated. No offence is given to the church, and no handle is given to the world against their Christian profession, as if, though the followers of Jesus, they did not live in harmony, or as if their principles fostered, or even allowed, a spirit of litigation.

CHAPTER III.

A TEST FOR ASCERTAINING THE EXISTENCE OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

It is a common observation, that every man has his weak side. The Scriptures, however, declare, that "charity covereth a multitude of sins." How strangely, but, at the same time, how frequently is this text perverted, when it is understood to denote, that almsgiving will at last be sustained as an apology for the commission of many transgressions! Its meaning plainly is, that the spirit of Christian love will lead us rather to overlook the defects of those, who are the objects of our affection, than to dwell upon them. This general principle we often see strikingly illustrated, both in the lenity with which fond parents are disposed to treat the faults that appear in the character of their children, and in the way in which the partiality of friendship leads men to draw a veil over the imperfections of those who

are the objects of their special regard, as well as to magnify their excellencies. It is thus that Christian charity covereth a multitude of sins, by disposing us to fix our attention on the favourable points in the character of our brethren, and to let their defects sink out of view.

This then furnishes a touchstone, by which we may be assisted in ascertaining whether or not we are possessed of this grace. When any offence takes place, which destroys love, this appears by a disposition to dwell on the defective part of a man's character, and to draw a veil over his counterbalancing excellencies. Wherever a man feels such a propensity, even though he should not communicate it to others, it should be viewed as a signal of alarm, — as an evidence that there is something in the state of his mind materially wrong.

It is well known, that many sad defects and inconsistencies are to be found even in the characters of those who give very satisfactory evidence, that they know the Gospel. You perhaps meet with a Christian who is generous, sympathizing with the afflicted, ready to contribute cheerfully and extensively to the spread of the Gospel, or the relief of the destitute. But withal he is possessed of a considerable share of irritability of temper, and inclined to oppose with vehemence, sometimes rather dogmatically, those who differ from him. If you are hurt by this peculiarity of temper, and do not view his character with the eye of Christian charity, you are apt to leave out of sight all his excellencies, and to dwell on this defect. On the other hand, dwelling on his excellencies, and trying (after friendly admo-

dition) to forget such a defect, which you could not expect to be altogether cured at once, would not only be a present expression of Christian love, but would also be calculated to preserve your affection to him from being injured, by any difference in opinion between you, or by the unseemly way in which that difference might, on his part, be expressed. Malignity dwells on the defects of a character. Love delights to contemplate its excellencies.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS OFTEN INCREASED BY MEN'S OWN FOLLY.

WE often hear of persecution for conscience's sake; and it is on high authority we believe, that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. There is a possibility, however, of increasing the offence of the cross, by our own improper temper and conduct. In such cases we are apt to suppose we are persecuted for righteousness's sake, and are disposed to feel a certain secret complacency, in thinking that we suffer so much in so good a cause. Nay, is not this sometimes related in the tone of self-gratulation, and plainly with a view to excite some admiration of that supposed zeal, and decision of character, which called forth so much opposition.

It is of much consequence, then, to distinguish between that opposition which is produced by the genuine manifestation of Christian principle, and that which is called forth by something quite different from Christianity, though under this guise; by something disgusting, unamiable, and unaccommodating in our temper or conduct, appearing in the family or in our intercourse with the world, or some manifest imprudence which involves us in difficulties, and which has no affinity to the humility, the meekness and gentleness of Christ. By overlooking this distinction, we may take to ourselves the credit of suffering for well-doing, while, in fact, such sufferings as we have may arise from a cause of the very opposite description.

Could we suppose a member of one of the Apostolic churches to rise from the dead, and witness what, in the present day, is often almost vauntingly talked of, under the formidable title of persecution for conscience' sake, it may be presumed he would see comparatively little that deserves such a name. One thing, at least, we may remark, that wherever any thing like the persecution experienced in early times was to be found, if we may judge from the apostolic writings, it would not be spoken of in the tone of boasting. No! it would be found too serious a matter to admit of such language. Wherever it existed, and was endured with an apostolic spirit, it would be mentioned with the sincerest compassion for the persecutors, with the deepest humility, and with the most lively gratitude to Him, by whose grace alone his people are supported under every trial, and carried through triumphant.

CHAPTER V.

THE EVIL OF HASTILY INDULGING SUSPICION
AGAINST THE PRINCIPLES OF A PUBLIC TEACHER.

FROM a variety of causes, such as early education ; early prejudices ; seeing a particular doctrine abused ; the particular style of the preacher, by whose instrumentality a person was first impressed ; or the books to which his attention was first directed ; one part of divine truth may more forcibly strike one person, and another, another. One may see more strongly the danger of self-righteousness. Another may be more powerfully impressed with the tendency of men to turn the grace of God into licentiousness. These, and similar circumstances, may lead some preachers to dwell more fully upon the principles of the Gospel, and others on its practical effects. In such cases, Christians often incautiously, and very improperly, suspect the principles of a preacher, because he does not so pointedly bring forward certain departments of divine truth as they could wish, and to which, from some adventitious circumstances, their attention has been more particularly directed.

This has sometimes proved a very unhappy source of division in churches. Thus, one man is most unjustly charged with leaning to Antinomianism, because he faithfully proclaims the doctrine of free

grace ; because he represents the Gospel as inviting the most worthless to believe in Jesus, and declaring that whatever they have been in times past, it furnishes ground for immediate comfort and joy. The doctrine of another is as unreasonably suspected of a tendency to self-righteousness, because he clearly and pointedly enforces the holy practical effects which the faith of the Gospel must necessarily produce.

How unseemly is it for Christians in this way to throw out suspicions against the sentiments of a preacher, unless there is the fullest evidence that the charges are well founded ! If they think there is a deficiency in his public labours, ought they not to point this out to himself ; to hear his own explanation of it ; and by friendly admonition, or instruction, if they think he needs it, to prevail upon him to supply what they conceive defective ? But circulating surmises respecting a man's principles, founded on mere suspicion, or because his discourses might be improved, while no charge of real error can be substantiated, is extremely criminal, and has often produced effects the most pernicious. It ought to be recollected, that wherever the usefulness of a preacher is impaired by such suspicions being circulated without foundation, all the evil effects which are the result, must lie at the door of those from whom such insinuations originated, or by whom they are retailed.

From what has just been remarked, may we not observe much of the divine wisdom, in that variety that appears in the gifts of preachers,—in their mode of address,—in the way in which they en-

deavour to find access to the consciences of their hearers,—and in those particular departments of divine truth on which they may more prominently dwell? The delusions under which men labour are very various. One has recourse to one refuge of lies, and another to another. Even among Christians, there is a variety in the particular direction in which they are apt to deviate from the right road. One man has a defective view of some leading doctrine of revelation, or does not clearly perceive the relation in which it stands to the rest; another is apt to overlook some important duty, or his constitutional temperament tends to draw a veil over the deformity of some sin which more easily besets him; a third is not fully aware of the peculiar danger to which something in his external situation more immediately exposes him. While one preacher, then, dwells more particularly on one part of divine truth, and another more pointedly directs his attention to another, there is, in this variety, a rich display of the wisdom and goodness of God. We perceive in it a beautiful accommodation to the diversified characters and circumstances of the hearers. Every one meets with something calculated for his own correction, reproof, and instruction in righteousness.

CHAPTER VI.

* HINTS TO PREACHERS, FOUNDED ON THE
PRECEDING CHAPTER.

THE caution to which the attention of hearers of the Gospel has been directed in the preceding remarks, naturally leads me to suggest a hint to preachers, respecting the care they should take not to give occasion to such objections as those to which I have alluded. The most effectual way of doing this, is rightly to divide the word of truth. Attention to this seems to require, *first*, that whatever topic is introduced, it be brought forward in the connexion in which it appears in the word of God. How often is this neglected! Particular doctrines are sometimes stated, and there they are left, without being followed up by a representation of their important practical consequences; and how often are duties explained, the obligation of which all must admit, while the connexion in which they are introduced is altogether unscriptural, and the animating principle of faith in the peculiar doctrines of divine truth is not explicitly stated, as the only one from which Christian obedience can flow.

Secondly, It is necessary, in our discourses, to

* These hints are inserted here, and not in the Part that more immediately regards preachers, because they are closely connected with the observations in the preceding Chapter.

give every part of revelation its own relative weight and importance. It is possible to dwell particularly on certain topics, where, though our views may be just, the subjects themselves may be comparatively of inferior magnitude, while those of the deepest moment are but partially introduced. By neglecting to take the word of God as a whole, many preachers fall into opposite extremes. Some, for example, are found dwelling incessantly on the evil of sin, and the necessity of mourning over it, while they would be apt to think any thing like cheerfulness and joy occupying the mind almost bordered on levity, and indicated but little knowledge, at least, of the deep deceitfulness and wickedness of the human heart. Others dwell so much on the subject of Christian joy, as hardly to admit sufficient room for that holy fear, in the exercise of which we are commanded to pass the time of our sojourning, so long as we continue to dwell in this world of temptation. Now, while humiliation on account of sin, and a holy fear of offending, must undoubtedly be found in every Christian, it is also an express precept of the word of God, to rejoice evermore. There must, of course, be something defective in that system which does not make room for both. These two Christian graces are so far from being incompatible, that they are beautifully associated in the character of the true believer. Fear chastens joy, while it keeps the eye fixed on the evil of sin, as displayed in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, the only source from which true joy can flow; while joy, on the other hand, preserves Christian fear from degenerating into the servility of a

slave appearing in the presence of his master, but maintains it as the filial awe felt by an affectionate child at the thought of disobeying a kind and beloved father.

Again, none can be said rightly to divide the word of truth, who do not keep constantly in their eye what ought to be the great end of preaching. This, in one word, is to lead to Jesus. Are the careless addressed? nothing is gained till this object be attained. Are the saints to be edified? it is by a fresh view of the glory of the Saviour, and the excellence of his salvation, that their edification is to be promoted. We sometimes find preachers particularly fond of such subjects as death, the final judgment, the importance of time, the value of the soul, &c. These are unquestionably in themselves good — very good — and, when properly treated, may be turned to the best account. But, does it not frequently happen, that the only object the preacher seems to have in view, is to produce some general impression of the fear of death, of the solemnity of the judgment, of the uncertainty of time, of the importance of the soul, without the hearer being able, from what he has heard, at the end of the discourse, to give an explicit answer to that question, what must I do to be saved? Every preacher should reflect, then, that much may be said on such subjects, and much important truth, too, without preaching the Gospel.

I have heard of a minister, who adopted it as a rule, never to preach a sermon, in which, upon the supposition that one was hearing him who never heard the Gospel before, he should not be able to

give some account of the way of a sinner's acceptance before God. Let none suppose that this will produce a tedious sameness. To Christians, a view of the same precious truth by which they are saved, ought certainly to be always acceptable; and with regard to those who know it not, it is the first thing they need to be taught. It is pleasing to see attention excited; and where it is so, it ought to be cherished, and every effort made to strengthen any salutary impression that may have been produced. But we ought ever to keep in mind, that nothing truly valuable, or which will be found to tell at the great day of trial, is attained with regard to any man, till he be brought to the foot of the cross. We shall only add, that it is in the apostolic writings we have the true model of rightly dividing the word of truth; and, by studying this model, we shall most clearly see the evil of those deviations from it which have been here noticed.

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP DOES NOT DESTROY CIVIL DISTINCTIONS.

“LET the brother of low degree,” says the Apostle James, “rejoice that he is exalted; but the rich in that he is made low.” Again, “If there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, and in

goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, sit thou here in a good place, and say to the poor, stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool; are ye not then partial in yourselves, and become judges of evil thoughts?" James 1:9 and 2:2. Some, misunderstanding the import of these, and similar passages, have been apt to forget the distinctions that are appointed by Providence in civil society, and to think that, among Christians at least, these ought in a great measure to be disregarded.

The plain design, however, of such passages, is to point out the impropriety of these distinctions being introduced into a church of Christ. Suppose, for example, a master and his servant, both members of the same church; when they meet together in a church capacity, they are on a level; and in any business that occurs, where the brethren are called to give their opinion, it would be extremely improper, it would imply that partiality which the Scriptures so pointedly condemn, if more attention were paid to the one than to the other. But, whenever they leave the meeting, they return to their different stations in civil life, as master and servant, as placed by Providence, the one in a higher station, and the other in a lower.

Christian servants, so far from being led to suppose that their obligations to obedience are in any measure diminished, from the circumstance of their being connected with Christian masters, are taught the very reverse. Such a consideration is mentioned by the Apostle Paul, as a call to peculiar attention

and faithfulness. 1 Tim. 6:1. "Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God, and his doctrine, be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort." We revolt then against the plain appointment of Him who has the government upon his shoulders, and is the great Lawgiver in his church, instead of observing his institutions, if we even secretly indulge a grudge at those distinctions which he has ordained.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NECESSITY OF FORBEARANCE, FROM THE VARIETY OF CHARACTER TO BE EXPECTED IN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

It will be allowed, I suppose, by all, that Christianity is a religion suited to persons possessed of various degrees of intellect; that, of course, it may exist in a character, where there is a considerable want of discernment; nay, where there is a manifest deficiency of that most valuable quality, which is generally known in the world by the name of common sense. The Apostle Paul seems to allude to this, when he says, Rom. 1:14, "I am a debtor,

both to the wise and the unwise." Not only were there among the disciples persons of shrewdness, discernment, a sense of propriety, and capable of managing the business of life, but also others who were extremely destitute of these qualities. Here it will be necessary for churches to distinguish between those weaknesses that arise from the feebleness of a man's intellectual powers, or from the want of a sense of propriety, and such conduct as fairly indicates a person to be a stranger to the influence of divine grace. While the latter would justly exclude a person from communion, the former ought to be the subject of patient forbearance, where the defect is intellectual, and admits not of a remedy, and of repeated, affectionate admonition, where a man blunders from mere want of prudence, or inadvertency.

Suppose, for example, when any arrangement occurs on which it is necessary to consult a church, a young man who is in a great measure a novice, and has little or no experience, were uniformly to be one of the first to give his opinion, and were even to give it with a considerable tone of decision, every person of discernment would see and feel in this case a great want of a sense of propriety. This, however, might be associated with such other features in his character, as would not authorize us to question his Christianity. Here, then, is a field for brotherly admonition and Christian watchfulness.

It must indeed be acknowledged, that one of the most hopeless of all attempts is that of communicating a sense of propriety, where it is not naturally inherent in the mind. An enlarged experience,

however, of the spirit of the Gospel, of that spirit which leads a man in all lowliness of mind to esteem others better than himself, will tend much to counteract those violations of propriety, which are apt to expose the individual who is chargeable with them, and to wound the feelings of those with whom he is connected.

But, while we are to look for various shades of intellectual vigour among the members of a Christian church, we are along with this to expect various degrees of knowledge. There are babes, young men, and fathers in Christ; and this variety renders mutual forbearance exceedingly necessary. Those who have made considerable progress in Christian knowledge, are in danger of not sufficiently bearing with such as are far behind them, ascribing, perhaps, their not seeing things exactly in the same light with themselves, to a want of submission to the authority of Christ. Such, on the other hand, as are far behind, from whatever cause, are in like manner in danger of entertaining suspicions of those who have got before them, alleging, it may be, that they are too much influenced by the love of novelty, and are led away by unedifying speculations.* There is also a difficulty in judging who are *before*, and who are *behind*. The younger are apt to think themselves far before others, because they have got much knowledge which is new to themselves; while the elder may imagine, that the mere circumstance of their having had longer experience, gives them a

* This charge is, in some cases, no doubt, well founded. But we ought to guard against an indiscriminate application of it, as in this way it may be brought against every alteration of sentiment, and even a genuine improvement in knowledge.

decided superiority. Much mutual forbearance, then, is here requisite. The strong ought to tremble at despising the weak, and the weak at attempting to counteract the progress of the strong. In my intercourse with one who professes to be a Christian brother, my question is not, at what precise part of the road do I find him? but, have I reason to think he is on it at all? If so, whatever be his attainments, I am called to rejoice in them, and to study, if it be in my power, to promote his improvement. If the Lord hath received him, I am bound to view him with cordial, Christian affection and complacency.

Improvement in the knowledge of some particular subjects may arise from a variety of causes. It sometimes happens, that some of the members of a church may have had their reading directed in a certain line; and from their having paid particular attention to one department of divine truth, what is quite new to others may to their minds be quite familiar. Wherever this is the case, it presents a strong temptation to indulge a spirit of pride and vain-glory, to guard against which much watchfulness is requisite. But another effect of this may be a want of forbearance with those, whose knowledge of the particular subject to which they have paid so large a share of their attention, is not so extensive as their own.

Here we perceive strikingly the necessity of one part of the character, which Paul expressly requires should be found in an elder or bishop. He must be *patient*. Much patience is requisite in instructing those who do not at first see how the laws of the Lord Jesus apply to a particular case, while others

perceive the application to be obvious and unavoidable. In such instances, brethren ought carefully to distinguish between an aversion to put in execution the law of Christ, where the proper mode of applying it is discerned, and the difficulty which some may feel in perceiving how it applies. The charge of wilful opposition to the authority of the great Lawgiver, is a very serious one, and ought not to be rashly preferred; nay, where Christians are united in fellowship, even the very suspicion of such opposition (unless there be some very obvious ground for it indeed) ought not to be allowed to enter the mind. That charity which thinketh no evil, will surely rather lead us to make every allowance for the imperfect discernment of our brethren, while it should stimulate us, in our occasional intercourse with them, to use the utmost perseverance and diligence to give them as correct views as possible of every part of revealed truth.

Almost every one allows, that a certain degree of forbearance is necessary among Christians, though many consider it extremely difficult to draw the precise line to which it should extend. If so, ought not mutual forbearance to be applied to this very point; or, in other words, should it not be exercised, in reference to this difference in opinion, respecting the precise length to which it ought to be carried. This, however, is seldom attended to. Are not many too apt to condemn all those who either do not come up to the precise limit they have thought proper to fix, or who venture to step beyond it? Now, this certainly cannot be justified, till they have ascertained, by clear and precise scriptural

evidence, what is the true limit to which forbearance ought to be extended.

The difficulty, however, of ascertaining this boundary, appears to others not so great. I do not say, that no cases of difficulty will occur; but the number of them will be at least greatly diminished, if we maintain what appears to be quite a scriptural principle, that where a man professes to believe the peculiar doctrines of revelation, while his general deportment is consistent with that profession, we are called to treat him as a disciple of Christ, though he appears to us to misunderstand some parts of the will of God.

I know, when some who oppose the exercise of forbearance on this general ground, are pushed in argument, they reply, we have no evidence that a person is a disciple, except in so far as he keeps the commandments; understanding by this, some external observance or form of church order, which they conceive to be clearly enjoined. Now, this proceeds on the supposition, that attending to that particular observance is at least a more decided evidence of faith in the Gospel, than the most conspicuous influence of Christian principle on the general tenor of the temper and conduct. Nay, it goes farther; it implies, that such an observance is *an essentially necessary mark of the Christian character*, and that no other kind of evidence is of any avail without it. If the argument is good for any thing, it would thus require us, in order to be consistent, to deny the Christianity of any one by whom the particular commandment referred to is not observed. Few, however, are disposed to acquiesce

in such a conclusion. But it is here mentioned, as an inference that is unavoidable, that those who are misled by this plausible statement, may, by tracing it to its consequences, perceive its fallacy. If they are not prepared to say, that they have no evidence of the Christianity of any, however distinguished by holiness of character, who do not see all the commandments in the same light with themselves, they virtually give up this argument altogether.

On this subject, one thing which particularly deserves notice is, the very different manner in which the Apostle Paul speaks of a mere difference of sentiment among Christians, on certain points of inferior magnitude, and those divisions among them that injured mutual affection. The passage where the former of these is noticed, is Rom. 14:1. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things; another who is weak eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. And let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth: yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it to the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord; for he giveth God thanks: and he that eateth not, to

the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. Let us not therefore judge one another any more ; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way." The other passage alluded to, is 1 Cor. 3:3. "For ye are yet carnal ; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions ; are ye not carnal, and walk as men ? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal ?"

Every one must acknowledge, that unity of sentiment among Christians is most desirable. But the question is, what spirit are they to manifest in their mutual intercourse, where this cannot be attained ? From the former of these passages, it is apparent, that while there were points of inferior magnitude in which the Christians at Rome, from early habits or prepossessions, or from remaining imperfection of knowledge, differed in sentiment ; while it was understood that every man was persuaded in his own mind, the Apostle expressly required them to manifest mutual love and forbearance.

On the other hand, when he speaks of those divisions that existed in the church at Corinth, where, though no difference of sentiment is mentioned, from the members ranging themselves under different leaders, a spirit of jealousy was introduced, and their mutual affection and confidence impaired, he expresses himself in terms of the most pointed condemnation. How often, in modern times, is the apostolic order reversed ! The subversion of mutual affection among Christians, is by many counted a trifling evil ; while the smallest deviation from unity

of sentiment, is often treated with the most unlimited reprobation.*

CHAPTER IX.

WANT OF CONCERN FOR THE SALVATION OF OTHERS, A PROOF THAT A SYSTEM IS MATERIALLY DEFECTIVE.

THE religion of some seems to be of a very selfish description. They appear very much concerned indeed about their own personal edification; but they can look with a considerable measure of indifference upon a world lying in wickedness, and even to be little affected with the thought of some of those with whom they are most closely connected by the ties of blood and affinity, being of this number. Such are seldom found cordially to encourage any plans of general usefulness; and though they will often contend most keenly for the greatest accuracy in the mode of stating their sentiments on particular subjects, it is with great difficulty you can bring them to give but a small portion of their time to instruct the ignorant in what may be called the first principles of the oracles of God.

* It has been remarked by that able critic, Dr. Campbell, of Aberdeen, in his Dissertation on Schism, that several phrases used by the Apostles, commonly understood to mean unanimous in opinion, denote, more properly, coinciding in affection, concurring in love, desire, hatred and aversion, — *Preliminary Dissertations*.

May we not with propriety apply to such characters, the language of our Lord, on a certain occasion; "These things ought ye to have done, and not have left the others undone?" Let personal edification be consulted. Let every improvement in knowledge be highly prized. Let the most correct, scriptural modes of expression be adopted, and even contended for, provided it be done in a proper spirit. But, however tenacious we may be, for particular modes of expression, or for the most minute observance of every apostolic institution, there is manifestly something wrong,—we show that we are destitute of the true apostolic spirit,—if we can possibly look with indifference on those who are out of the way, and if we neglect to improve such opportunities, as our particular situations afford us, of directing them into it. What was Paul's language on such an occasion? "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not; my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." And again: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved." Rom. 9:1 and 10:1.

Every period of Paul's history, from that interesting day when he was arrested on the road to Damascus, bears the most ample testimony to the unceasing ardor with which he longed for the salvation of men. For this he prayed, and for this he laboured. For this he submitted to stripes and imprisonment. For this he submitted himself "to

perils of waters, to perils of robbers, to perils by his own countrymen, to perils by the heathen, to perils in the city, to perils in the wilderness, to perils in the sea, to perils among false brethren." For this he was exposed "to weariness and painfulness, and watchings often, to hunger and thirst, to fastings often, to cold and nakedness." In this service he esteemed it his honour to "spend and be spent;" and in it, at last, we have reason to believe, he bled and died. But why thus quote Paul? Was not he, it may be asked, altogether an extraordinary character? He undoubtedly was. But mark the use, which, under the impulse of inspiration, he himself calls us to make of his history. "Be ye followers of me," says he to every disciple, "as I also am of Christ." In proportion as he resembled the illustrious and only perfect Example of every excellence, we are called to imitate him. As the followers of Jesus, we are under the same obligations to him that Paul was. We rest our hopes on the same foundation, and look for the same glorious inheritance. There must, therefore, be something materially defective, if we are not in our measure animated by the same spirit.

CHAPTER X.

THE EVIL OF PARTY SPIRIT.

WHERE there is a plurality of pastors in a church, or different churches in the same neighbourhood, so that the gifts of the public teachers may become subjects of comparison, it is of much importance for the members of these churches to guard against party spirit. This seems to be the evil which Paul so much condemned in the church at Corinth, 1 Cor. 1:12. "Every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." The disciples in that city appear to have been influenced by an undue attachment to this or the other public teacher, which led them to put him out of his own place; to forget that he was a mere instrument, and only useful as God made him so; while they comparatively overlooked or undervalued the gifts and usefulness of others. This generated strife and division, and led the members to confine their affections to one particular public teacher, and to one class of their brethren, instead of maintaining that mutual love, which ought to have been equally extended to the whole body.

Party spirit of this kind is, *first*, hurtful to the individual who indulges it. It implies the want of a due impression of his dependence on the great Head of the church, for edification, while he lays so much

stress on a particular instrument. But whatever tends to weaken this impression, or in any measure to withdraw the attention of the Christian from his divine Master, by fixing it on any other object, must be injurious to his spiritual improvement. Besides, where this spirit exists, that mutual love, which ought to circulate among all the members of a church, is violated; and as it is love that edifies, where it is wounded, the soul cannot prosper.

Secondly, While such partiality is hurtful to the individual by whom it is cherished, the injury is not confined to himself. It is infectious. One reason of this is obvious. It is much easier for human nature to indulge in such a spirit, than to walk in self-denied obedience to the Lord Jesus. It ought also to be recollected, that where particular partiality is manifested to one individual, it is a temptation to others, who have perhaps an equally strong attachment to a different object, to discover the same partiality to him. Whoever, then, contributes to diffuse such a spirit, by first setting the pernicious example, has much guilt upon his head, and is to be considered as in a great measure responsible for all the baneful consequences that may follow.

The evil I am speaking of, further tends materially to injure a pastor's usefulness. He is heard by some with jealousy and prejudice. He is imagined to have things in view in his discourses, which never once entered his mind; while words or phrases are taken out of their natural connexion, and ideas attached to them, which he never meant to convey. Others are apt to hear with as unreasonable a partiality. Instead of hearing with a spirit of inquiry,

and trying whatever they hear by the only unerring standard, the authority of a favourite preacher is enough with them; and thus their faith is apt to stand in the wisdom of men, rather than in the power of God. Instead of hearing for themselves, and considering what aspect a particular subject wears to them individually, they are in great danger of hearing for others, and of having their minds diverted from the personal application of divine truth, by thinking how this or the other hearer will relish some particular sentiment, that may be introduced, some mode of expression that may be employed, or some reproof that may be administered.

Again, where party spirit prevails, the comfort of a pastor must be materially affected by it; and this cannot fail to hurt his usefulness. The very idea, that he is heard by some with jealousy and prejudice, is likely to make him preach in a manner much less calculated to edify, than he would do otherwise. The liberty he will experience in stating divine truth will be greatly abridged, from the constant apprehension, that he is not listened to with that lenity, which a candid hearer ought to feel at the occurrence of those partial inaccuracies in expression, into which all who speak in public are occasionally apt to fall; and from knowing that a single unguarded phrase may have a construction put upon it, which he never intended to convey.

Need I add, that while prejudice against a public teacher, on the one hand, is apt to injure his usefulness, by discouraging him; an overweening partiality, on the other, and the injudicious expression of it, is perhaps equally or more dangerous. While a

church, then, ought to show a pastor, that they are at least as much inclined to approve as condemn, and thus to give him every encouragement in his work, they ought to guard against whatever might tend to puff him up with a spirit of vanity and self-conceit, by making him suppose that his gifts and attainments are very superior to those of his brethren. He cannot fail to be injured by whatever contributes to weaken or destroy the humbling, but salutary impression he ever ought to feel of the imperfections that adhere to his very best services.

Those who are acquainted with human nature, well know, that this admiration of the gifts of a public teacher, is one of the most seducing of the many dangerous paths, by which those employed in public service are apt to be led astray from the right way ; or, (to vary the figure,) that it is one of the most dangerous of those rocks on which many, who have set out with fair prospects of doing extensive good, have made shipwreck of their usefulness, if not of their souls. Let Christians, then, most carefully guard against throwing a temptation from this quarter, in the way of any of their brethren. The well-known author of the *Task*, in his usual elegant and happy manner, describes this evil in the following beautiful lines :—

“Oh, popular applause ! what heart of man
Is proof against thy sweet, seducing charms ?
The wisest, and the best, feel urgent need
Of all their caution, in thy gentlest gales.
But, swelled into a gust, who then, alas !
With all his canvass set, and inexpert,
And therefore heedless, can withstand thy power ?
Praise from the shrivelled lips of toothless, bald

Decrepitude ; and in the looks of lean
 And craving poverty ; and in the bow
 Respectful of the smutched artificer ;
 Is oft too welcome, and may much disturb
 The bias of the purpose. How much more
 Poured forth by beauty, splendid and polite,
 In language soft as adoration breathes !
 Ah, spare your idol ! think him human still !
 Charms he may have, but he has frailties too ;
 Doat not too much, nor spoil what ye admire."

So fully am I convinced of the pernicious tendency of that party spirit, which leads to undue admiration of some, and to equally undue and unwarrantable contempt of others, that I wish I could leave every reader impressed with a conviction, that wherever it is indulged, either among the members of an individual church, or among neighbouring churches, it may be considered as the signal of departing usefulness among pastors, and of departing prosperity in the societies with which they are connected.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDLY INTERCOURSE
 BETWEEN NEIGHBOURING CHURCHES, AND WHAT
 SEEMS NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN IT.

WHERE churches are adjacent, it seems of the utmost importance, nay, essentially necessary to their mutual harmony and prosperity, that they should guard against interfering with one another's

discipline. If any one, for example, has offended in one church, it seems quite unscriptural to receive him into another, till he has removed the offence he gave to the church with which he was at first connected. I here go on the supposition, that such churches are living in fellowship, and that there is no reason to suspect impropriety in the way in which the discipline of the church is administered.

I know it has been said, in opposition to this, that such a principle is in danger of trenching on the independence of churches; that if any person apply for admission to a church, if he profess present subjection to the law of Christ, it is all that the members of that church are entitled to require; and that if a church that had been offended, peremptorily insisted that the offender should appear before them, such a demand might rather have the appearance of indulging a vindictive spirit, which Christianity expressly condemns.

In replying to these objections, we would first notice what is the great design of discipline. Is it not partly intended for the good of the individual, and partly for that of the general body? It is intended to humble the aggressor; to subdue that remaining corruption that is in the human heart; while at the same time the fall of a brother should be improved, as furnishing a warning to the rest. But is it not manifest, that both these ends are in a great measure defeated, by that interference of one church in the discipline of another, to which we have alluded? Every one knows, that where a person has given offence, it is much easier, much less humiliating to the offender, to go and confess

how far he was wrong, to others, (even supposing this is required of him,) than to those to whom the offence was originally given. And if the offender can thus shun discipline, the church, of course, loses that benefit, which it is appointed to derive from the application of it. To talk of the vindictive spirit of a church, is here out of the question. If any church act in such a spirit, in any part of its procedure, to itself be the blame. But it is the plain duty of a church, in the spirit of love, and not of resentment, to call an offender to repentance. They violate the command of Christ, if they neglect this; and the offender does so, while he neglects to listen to the call.

If I be asked for apostolic authority on this point, I reply, that, *first*, we have undoubted evidence of the harmony and confidence that subsisted among the first churches, from the members of one church receiving letters of recommendation to the brethren of another, when they went to that part of the country where they were placed. See Acts 15:23—25. 18:27. 1 Cor. 16:3. 2 Cor. 3:1. Now, if this mutual harmony and confidence subsisted among the churches planted by the Apostles; and if, at the same time, it is manifest, that such a practice as we allude to must destroy all mutual confidence, it is plainly incompatible with the manner in which they acted, and with the spirit that pervaded every part of their procedure.

But farther; will not the same inference follow, if it be manifest that the design of discipline is here counteracted? Is it not one obvious part of that design, to remove offences from the minds of those

who have received them? But if men will not submit to discipline, this is not done; and is it not evidence sufficient, that any practice is contrary to apostolic appointment, if it manifestly counteract the design of a plain apostolic institution? The apostles commanded the disciples not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. Now, if any should take it into their heads to assemble with their brethren, but whenever the assembly was formed, should go away, alleging they had literally obeyed the precept; would not every one condemn them? If such, in this case, were to ask me a scriptural reason for condemning their conduct; I would answer, that common sense implied, that when Christians were thus assembled, it was for the purpose of social worship, and mutual edification; and if any man acted so that these ends could not be attained, this was condemnation enough. In the same way, any measure by which the design of discipline is plainly frustrated, is to me argument sufficient against it.

Should any one still further demand something from apostolic example on this subject, I have no hesitation to try the principle on this ground. I maintain, that an offender ought to submit to the discipline of the individual church he has offended; and I quote, in support of the position, the case of the offender in the church at Corinth. There we find one who had offended his brethren. The church with which he was connected were called first to exclude him; and afterwards, *the same brethren* were commanded, on evidence of repentance, to restore him again. Here is a case perfectly in

point. If any one take up the opposite ground, that an offender may, with propriety, go to another church, and that other church may receive him, though he refuses to submit to discipline in the church with which he was at first connected, I conceive he is bound either to show that the evil effects I have pointed out do not naturally follow, or to bring forward as explicit a Scripture example of such a practice having taken place, and of its having received the sanction of apostolic authority, as the example on the opposite side that has just been quoted.

But the principal fallacy in the reasoning, by which any one would attempt to justify such a practice, seems to lie here. It is argued, if a person apply to a church for admission, and appear at the time to be in subjection to the law of Christ, we have no business to make farther inquiry. But I ask, when a man professes subjection to the authority of Christ, what is the evidence that his profession is sincere? All will admit that he must manifest this in his conduct. Here, then, seems to be the hinge of the argument. If any man has given just cause of offence to a church, so as to subject himself to discipline, *he is bound by the law of Christ to submit to that discipline*, and thus remove the offence. All professions, therefore, which a man in such circumstances may make, of submission to the authority of the Lord Jesus, I am forced to consider as null and void, till he prove their sincerity by his conduct; or, in other words, till he submit to the discipline of the church he has offended. Till this be done, whatever he may profess, he is living in

deliberate opposition to the divine authority; so that, if a church receive him in such circumstances, they must certainly be considered as receiving him under this character.

It has been farther objected, that the principle for which I am here contending, is one that will not universally apply. For example, it has been asked, If a man, after offending a church in America, should pass over to England, and profess repentance, would you in this case send him back to the church he had formerly offended? Nothing is more easy than to perplex the plainest proposition with imaginary difficulties. It will be deemed, I trust, a sufficient answer to this objection, to state a parallel case. If a man comes from a distant country, where he had defrauded another, but has it not in his power, from the distance, to make restitution, profess repentance for his conduct, I must accept of that profession; but if he has defrauded his next door neighbour, and professes repentance, while at the same time he refuses to make restitution, it is on good grounds I consider his profession as insincere.

Some may be apt to think I have dwelt longer on this point than is at all requisite, since the case may be to them so clear, as to admit of little or no dispute. It has not, however, appeared to all in the same light. I know it has been viewed differently by some, whose opinions on other subjects seem extremely correct, and whose characters in many points, I sincerely esteem.

What has now been stated, is introduced with a view to induce such to give the subject a more minute investigation. And I need hardly add, that if

any of us adopt sentiments which, upon a fuller examination, are found indefensible, it is not only our duty, but highly to our credit, when we discover this, explicitly to relinquish them.

It is almost unnecessary to suggest, that it is not only the business of pastors to be watchful against the introduction of what is evil; it is also the duty of all the brethren, as, if an unscriptural practice be admitted, all are chargeable with guilt who give it their sanction. It is impossible to estimate the extent of those pernicious consequences which may flow from one false principle. What now are the natural effects of the one we have been considering? The first and most immediate one must be completely to relax the discipline of individual churches. If, whenever a member is offended at the application of the laws of the house of God, he may go away, and find an asylum in a neighbouring church, must it not pave the way for the destruction of discipline altogether, and open a door for every irregularity? But what must be its effect on the friendly intercourse of neighbouring churches? This, of course, must be destroyed; and, while brethren are jealous of whatever might trench on the independence of churches, ought they not to be as watchful against any thing that might infringe on their unity? The one of these was as clearly a feature in the history of the apostolic churches as the other. If the practice against which I am arguing were to become general, instead of Christians living together in unity, a spirit of mutual jealousy and animosity would be likely to ensue. Instead of rejoicing in each other's prosperity, and feeling godly sorrow,

when any of the members of a neighbouring church brought reproach on the common cause, would there not be rather a danger of a certain degree of satisfaction being excited, from hearing of such things among them; because they would be viewed as a confirmation of the impropriety of the principles on which they were supposed to act? Such things are “not of the Father, but of the world.” Those who know what is in human nature, will view such effects rather as matter of lamentation than surprise. But, is it not reason enough for suspecting any principle to be wrong, supposing even there were nothing else against it, if it manifestly has a tendency to lead to such consequences.

In connexion with the preceding observations, some additional cases may be here stated, that are likely to occur in the intercourse of neighbouring churches. *First*, Suppose a member of a neighbouring church to apply for admission into another society, complaining that, in a case of discipline, his brethren had not dealt fairly with him; and suppose the church to which he applied really thought the man in the right, and the other church in the wrong, it may be asked, where does the path of duty here seem to lie? Before a church, in this case, can do any thing, they ought at least fully to hear both sides of the question. It is not enough, surely, to hear the person’s own account of the matter who is aggrieved, or that of his friends, who may have formed their opinion from the account he has given them; but the account also of the church itself, where the discipline took place, and of the grounds on which their decision was formed. If, after hear-

ing this, it should be found that they had mistaken or misapplied the law of Christ, they can surely have no objections, nay, they ought to be very thankful to have this pointed out. In this way, the ground of difference between the offender, and the church with which he was connected, would be done away; and what satisfaction would a neighbouring church have, in thus restoring concord and unanimity where it was broken!

Suppose it is farther asked, how a church is to do, if they receive application for admission from one who formerly belonged to a society not in connexion with them, but who is under the discipline of that society at the time the application is made? We should certainly imagine a church not at liberty to proceed in this case, without learning the grounds on which that society acted. Though, in many things, we may think them wrong, in this they may be right; and so far as they are so, we ought to guard most carefully against counteracting what they do, or contributing to encourage any one in iniquity.

Another case is likely to occur, as independent churches multiply. It may happen, that some of the members of one church may be situated equally near, or perhaps (especially in the case of the formation of a new church) nearer another. Without having any specific objection to the church with which they were at first connected, they may be disposed to join the other. With regard to the propriety of such a measure, people may entertain different opinions; but it occurs to me, that such changes must be a matter of forbearance. A hint or two, however, on this point, may not be improper.

The reason frequently given for such a step, is, that the person who takes it receives greater edification from the public teaching in the one church than in the other. The Lord, no doubt, has bestowed a variety of gifts on his servants; and if a member of a church tells me, he really reaps more benefit from the way a brother states divine truth, than from the manner in which I do it, I should certainly feel myself very much to blame, if I stood in the way of his greatest possible improvement. There is no need for any variance or jealousy taking place on this account. I ought to rejoice in the usefulness of my brother in a particular case, and he in like manner ought to rejoice in mine. At the same time, it deserves the consideration of those who leave a church on this ground, if it does not imply their laying too little stress on the fellowship of the brethren, and their making the pastor too much the bond of their union with the church. Though every one must be aware of the great importance of good public teaching, yet those who have just views of church fellowship, will not hold this as the only consideration by which their forming a connexion with a church ought to be regulated.

Again, when members thus remove from one church to another, let them see that they be not influenced by an improper spirit, and act from improper motives. Let it not be the result of prejudice, arising perhaps from something with which they are not satisfied, though they do not speak it out.

I cannot here omit mentioning the impropriety with which many are chargeable in leaving the communion of a church, while they decline giving

any reason for it. No one ought to take such a step without a reason; and if that consists in something which he finds objectionable in the conduct of the church, or of some individual members in it, ought not this evil to be pointed out in the spirit of Christian love, in order that it may be remedied? Nay, is there not a melancholy want of fidelity, if any one leave the communion of a church on such a ground, without acting in this manner? There is indeed one exception here, which delicacy may dictate. This is, when a person leaves a church from want of edification from the pastoral teaching, while there is no direct error of which he has to complain. It seems, in this case, a proper exercise of Christian feeling, not unnecessarily to excite prejudice in the minds of others, and thus perhaps injure their edification, as well as the pastor's usefulness, by giving at least much publicity to the reason of such a separation.

Farther, let Christians guard against a party spirit, and that overweening attachment to a particular teacher which, as we have already noticed, Paul so pointedly condemns in the Corinthians, and which seems to indicate the want of a sufficient conviction, that it is God alone that giveth the increase. Let them especially guard against a fickle and versatile disposition. Frequent changes in this way are surely no indications of spiritual prosperity. They are far from being conducive to the benefit of the individual, and they have a great tendency to mar the mutual comfort and cordiality of the churches in which they take place.

CHAPTER XII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN
INCIDENTAL EVILS, AND THOSE WITH WHICH A
SYSTEM IS CHARGEABLE.

IF any one would form a correct opinion on any subject, it is evidently of the utmost importance not to be swayed by prejudice, nor to prejudge a cause before its merits be fairly examined. It is also of much consequence here to distinguish between certain adventitious and incidental circumstances, which may appear in connexion with a particular system, and what naturally, if not necessarily, derives its origin from the system itself. Thus it sometimes happens, that, in attempting to exercise Christian discipline, particularly in the infancy of churches, where the nature of it, and the mode of conducting it, have not been properly understood, some foolish step has at first been taken. This has led to others. One untoward circumstance after another has occurred; and in this way a most inveterate prejudice has been formed against the whole system on which such persons professed to act. Here, then, it must be allowed, a man judges under the influence of prejudice, and not from a regard to truth, if he confounds the casual improprieties of an individual, or of a particular society, with the principles avowed by them in common with the general body with which they are connected. It is plain, that such incidental improprieties will be found

among all classes, even among those who profess to act on the very best system; and hence, if they be enough to condemn any system, they might condemn one of this description, as well as others, and indeed no one would be able to stand.

One who is disposed to judge impartially, will, I think, allow that this case is very different from that where the *general body* of those who profess to act upon certain principles are wrong. Here one of these two conclusions must inevitably follow; either that the principles themselves are bad, and of course lead to pernicious consequences; or that the general body is chargeable with the grossest hypocrisy, by publicly professing to hold opinions which their conduct shows have really no influence on their minds. And here, again, it becomes a subject of consideration, if there be not something radically wrong in a system, by which the continued exercise of such hypocrisy is countenanced or permitted.

When appearances, at first sight painful and unseemly, are found among any class of professing Christians, if we would avoid the charge of judging rashly, and guard against judging falsely, it is necessary to inquire whence such appearances originate. They may arise from an attempt to purge out the old leaven, which has so diffused itself through the body, that it is difficult to get it separated; from endeavouring to put in execution some of the laws of Christ, while the proposal is, through ignorance or prejudice, resisted; or from the public avowal of what almost all now see to be a portion of divine truth, though the prejudices and education of many may incline them to oppose it.

But though it is certainly desirable, that such improvements should take place, with as little that is unseemly and improper, in the manner of conducting them, as possible, even the jarrings and commotions that may occur in such circumstances, are, to the impartial observer, not so unfavourable an indication as that profound quiet which is the result of winking at corruption ; which betokens the powerful influence of the party that would protect it, discouraging the investigation of it ; and which is the signal of the cessation of every thing like a vigorous attempt to root it out. Such a quiet ought to be no subject of consolation or of boasting. It is like the quiet of Etna before an eruption : it awfully portends a catastrophe the most tremendous. This indeed is often seen even in the present world, when the Lord cometh forth from his place in righteous judgment, to punish the lengthened resistance of his authority, and the abuse of his institutions.* But though such a manifestation of his displeasure in the present life should be for ages suspended, or appear to our limited views in particular instances to be entirely omitted, we ought to weigh with the utmost care the principles we maintain, and the measures we support, while we look forward to the period when the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest, when we shall be tried by the standard of the word which Jesus hath spoken, and when the righteous Judge shall render to every man according to his works.

* In the scenes exhibited some years ago in France, particularly in the history of the more immediate supporters of the Roman Catholic superstition, we have a striking illustration of this remark,

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME OF THE EXTREMES INTO WHICH CHRISTIANS
ARE APT TO FALL.

It is a common and just remark, that men are apt to run from one extreme to another. The following hints may be useful on this subject, especially to those who may have joined Baptist or other orthodox churches. Many persons of this description were formerly in societies, where they are sensible there was nothing like unity of sentiment, and where Christian fellowship with the general body was never even looked for. There is a possibility of expecting, then, in their new situation, too much uniformity of opinion; such a degree of it as is incompatible with difference of sentiment on any point whatever, and as tends to render in a great measure useless, all the precepts respecting mutual forbearance, which the Apostles found it so necessary to inculcate.

We ought indeed ever to recollect, that, where difference of sentiment exists, it is a proof of a certain degree of remaining ignorance and imperfection somewhere; and Christians ought ever to be solicitous, by their progressive improvement in knowledge, to have all such difference as much as possible done away. At the same time, we ought not to forget, that while all the members of the apostolic

churches were professedly united in the faith of the Gospel, there were points on which they differed, while that difference did not affect their union;—points, in which all that the Apostle required was, that every man should be persuaded in his own mind. I am well aware, there may be cases in which it would be a very difficult task to draw the line here. But I wish to remind Christians, that similar differences may still be expected while knowledge is imperfect, and that of course there is still use for those precepts respecting forbearance. Indeed, were this not admitted, there would be a great danger of leading men to act more under the influence of authority than conviction; and it is very possible for an illegitimate authority to be exercised by a church, as well as an individual.

Again, most of the persons referred to were, in their former situation, altogether inexperienced in the duty of mutual watchfulness. Where Christian communion with the general body was not supposed to be necessary, and not taken into calculation, this duty could not be observed. It is not then to be wondered at, if at first some err, both with regard to the *subjects* to which this mutual watchfulness should refer, and the *spirit* with which this duty should be performed.

Thus, in watching over others, some may go too far. It may degenerate into a censorious spirit, or an abridgment of Christian liberty. It may descend to things in themselves in a great measure indifferent; and, instead of being beneficial, it may become irksome and vexatious. Now, this ought to be carefully avoided. We should see, when we re-

prove a brother, that the reproof should regard either what is in itself directly criminal, or that which plainly leads to what is so. If we manifest a disposition to object to what is not properly a ground of offence, our conduct tends to impair that mutual freedom and confidence that ought to subsist among the members of a church. It also gives a handle to the world against our principles ; and it furnishes to Christians, who are in situations where all mutual watchfulness and Christian discipline are disregarded, a kind of consolation (though surely a very false one) for living in the neglect of one of the plain commandments of Jesus Christ.

In attending to the duty of mutual watchfulness, it is also of the greatest importance ever to keep in view the motive from which it ought to flow, and the manner in which it should be performed. Love is that motive ; and if it do not flow from this pure source, all is wrong. But it may sometimes originate from this motive, while, at the same time, the design of it may be in a great measure defeated by the *manner* in which the duty is discharged. Here, then, is what also demands much attention. When called either to admonish or reprove a brother, the *manner* and *spirit* with which it is done ought ever to furnish the most unequivocal evidence that our conduct is dictated by love.

Among other extremes into which men are apt to fall, the two following also frequently occur. The one consists in maintaining such a bigoted attachment to what has received the sanction of antiquity, and of venerable names, as to determine a person to listen to nothing that may be said against it, by

whatever force of reasoning the objection adduced may be supported. The other lies in such a love of novelty, as makes the mere circumstance of a sentiment being new, almost recommendation sufficient, without farther inquiry, while whatever is not possessed of this charm is apt to be viewed with a jealous eye. It is difficult to say which of these two extremes is most unfavourable to solid improvement in the knowledge of divine truth. Both of them ought certainly to be most carefully avoided, by every one who aims at extensive and correct views of the word of God.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNNECESSARY DELAYS IN ADMITTING MEMBERS INTO CHURCHES, OUGHT TO BE AVOIDED.

WHEN application is made to a pastor for admission to a church, if he decline bringing forward the case, it is certainly his duty to give to the person applying a reason for so doing. If it be deficiency in knowledge, or something in temper or character that is inconsistent with the Christian profession, or even a want of positive evidence of the influence of the Gospel, let it be distinctly stated, as it is only by the attention of the individual being thus directed to the objection, whatever it may be, that we can expect he will endeavour to have it removed.

While we always ought to have a distinct reason for what we do, fidelity here seems plainly to require, that that reason should be mentioned.

Again, while the members of a church ought to do every thing in their power, to obtain satisfaction respecting the views and character of those who apply for admission into their society, they ought at the same time to guard against throwing unnecessary difficulties in their way. Sometimes it happens, that objections are repeated, which were before satisfactorily answered; or when persons who have difficulties wish a delay, they do not endeavour, as speedily as possible, to get the ground of these difficulties removed. An attention to the great law of love would effectually correct this fault. Let any one suppose himself placed in the situation of the person applying, and if he recollect and reduce to practice the golden maxim which requires him to do to others as he would (*i. e.* as he could reasonably expect, if acting on Christian principles,) that others would do to him, the evil to which I refer will be completely avoided.

It is here sometimes alleged, that these little delays to which applicants are exposed, are a trial of their temper and character, as these will be best ascertained, when it is seen with what spirit such mortifications are borne. But though such persons are Christians, may not conduct of this kind tend to chafe and irritate their minds? and though they may bear the trial, it may generate a disgust at those who have thus treated them, which to their own deep regret may afterwards greatly injure their mutual love and confidence. Christians are not at

liberty to subject the tempers and feelings of one another to unnecessary trials. These will come from other quarters in abundance, to such as will live godly. It is surely more suitable for Christian brethren to encourage and soothe one another under these trials, than to take a share in the unseemly employment of the world, by increasing them. We are entitled to calculate upon something from our professed friends, very different from what we have reason to expect from our avowed enemies.

CHAPTER XV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORDER AND REGULARITY IN CONDUCTING THE BUSINESS OF A CHURCH.

THE members of a church should ever guard against confounding what is necessary to order and regularity in their social meetings, with what is an abridgment of their Christian liberty. It is a leading feature of all Christian obedience, whether it regard the conduct of individuals, or of Christians in a collective capacity, that it must flow from conviction. Hence the members of a church, before their obedience can be of a right kind, must be convinced, that what is done by the pastor, is done according to the law of Christ. In order that this cheerful acquiescence of all the members in the administration of the laws of the kingdom of Christ may be obtained,

the pastor ought distinctly to give all the requisite information on the case in question, and to show how the rules enjoined in Scripture apply to it. But it ought to be ever recollected, that the pastor is the individual to whom the administration of these laws properly belongs, as appointed by his brethren to the office of ruler among them, and that order and the welfare of the church require, that the members should carefully guard against throwing difficulties in his way in the discharge of this duty.

To avoid a long discussion in applying the laws of Christ, which is seldom profitable, and often much the reverse, the pastor ought to be possessed of every information which is fitted to enable him to state the case that is brought forward, with the utmost perspicuity. — Though unnecessary delays in the administration of discipline are to be avoided, if a partial delay shall enable the pastor to procure any additional information, which will make the case more clear, it is certainly much better to have recourse to it, than to bring forward such a case before the most satisfactory information can be stated.

Again, it is improper in all common cases, to bring forward any new subject in a church, without the pastor being previously acquainted with it. Whatever business comes before any society, ought regularly to come through the medium of the person who, for the time, is presiding among them. It is unreasonable to expect, that a pastor should stand prepared to answer any question that may be suggested, or to give an opinion on any new proposition which may be unexpectedly mentioned. Indeed such an introduction of any thing, with which he

was previously unacquainted, would argue great ignorance of good order in the individual who brought it forward, and a sad neglect of it in the church where it was practised. It is in general necessary that the pastor be acquainted with whatever case is laid before the brethren, that he may be able to give them a proper representation of it, and show how in that particular case the law of Christ applies.

“The children of this world,” it is said, “are wiser in their generation, than the children of light.” The previous acquaintance, which it is considered those employed in the execution of human laws must have of every case that comes before them, furnishes, in this respect, a useful lesson to the churches of Christ. An attention to regularity in this way will be found greatly conducive to the peace and harmony of a church, and to the satisfaction and unanimity with which business is conducted, while the neglect of it is likely to open the way to strife, and division, and every evil work.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EVIL OF BEING SWAYED BY FAMILY CONNECTIONS IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

THE religion of some is very much the reverse of forsaking father and mother for Christ. We have heard of a church being thrown into no small degree

of agitation, because the near relation of one of its members was not received, or because the discipline of the house of God was impartially applied to him. The relation of the person rejected or reprov'd, did not perhaps oppose the measure publicly, but he complained to other members. They secretly joined him; and the first opportunity that occurred, the secret dissatisfaction, which was thus produced and fostered, manifested itself. How very unseemly and unscriptural is such a temper! Christians ought to be extremely cautious in judging, wherever their own interests are involved, or wherever the character of those with whom they are more immediately connected, are implicated. They ought to recollect, that in such cases they are extremely liable to partiality; and that others are much better qualified to judge, who are not likely to be influenced either in one way or another.

Any one who is aware of the extreme deceitfulness of his own heart, will be particularly jealous of himself, if placed in the situation here supposed, lest, by giving way to a false bias, he be chargeable with all the pernicious consequences which are likely to flow from it. These are many. He injures his own mind, by the irritation and improper spirit that is manifested. He is also in danger of doing the most material injury to the relation, whose comfort or interest he perhaps thinks he is promoting. Surely no church can for a moment be suspected of objecting to the admission of one that is obviously living under the influence of the Gospel. So far is this from being the case, that I have uniformly seen a high degree of satisfaction expressed at receiving

one who is known as a very decided, Christian character.

I shall suppose, then, that a difficulty sometimes occurs to a pastor, at proposing one who applies for admission, not from any thing directly wrong, but from want of some positive evidence of such a person's Christianity. When this objection is made, unless his profession of the faith be of a very recent date, it will usually be found that there is some ground for it. Now, the statement of this objection to the individual in question, may lead him to greater circumspection, and greater decision in his Christian profession, and in this way may do him an essential service. But if this is known, and if a relative in the church should espouse his cause, and not be disposed to listen to the objection stated, it must tend immediately to withdraw the attention of the applicant from his own deficiency, and lead him to view with a hostile eye, those who express any difficulty to his reception. How ought a man to tremble at the thought, that, while he is thus gratifying the present wishes of a relation, he may be doing his soul a material injury ! It is easy to see the pernicious effects which such a conduct is likely to have on the church at large. Its peace is in danger, for the time, of being in some measure broken ; a party spirit is apt to be generated ; the exercise of mutual love and mutual confidence is suspended ; and it will be well if things do not issue in strife and division, and every evil work.

But though these pernicious consequences are sufficiently obvious, and may with propriety be pointed out ; yet it is upon the plain opposition of

such a spirit to the authority of the Lord Jesus, that we ground its condemnation. It is an apostolic admonition, that in the church of Christ, nothing is to be done by partiality. "Who is my mother?" said the Lord Jesus, "and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren; for whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother;" Matt. 12:48. We shall only add, that the evil we have mentioned, is chiefly apt to take place in small churches, or in those, whatever their size may be, where one or two individuals may have a considerable influence. It is also most likely to be found in the infancy of a church, and where there is but little knowledge and experience. It shows, indeed, that the attainments of the individual are on a low scale, if such a spirit can at all be manifested; and those of the church cannot be high, if it is not immediately checked and reproved.

CHAPTER XVII.

HINTS TO CHRISTIAN SERVANTS.

THOSE who have to do with servants well know how much this useful class of the community have it in their power, either to disturb the comfort of a family, or to promote it. This circumstance affords

Christian servants a valuable opportunity of silently, but most powerfully, recommending the Gospel of Christ, by manifesting its amiable spirit, and showing the happy effects it produces, in the station in which they are placed. Servants professing godliness ought to be solicitous to get into families where they are as little likely to be exposed to temptation as possible. All who know the deceitfulness of the heart, will see the necessity of attending to this. It is surely no indication that servants are very anxious to be preserved from the evils that are in the world, if, perhaps, for a trifling addition of wages, they are ready to take a place where they are obviously exposed to many temptations.

Christians, too, in engaging in service, ought to endeavour, as far as they can, to secure the enjoyment of their Christian privileges. It is very unseemly in servants professing the faith of the Gospel, unless there be some very peculiar circumstances in the case, to go into situations where they are in a great measure excluded from the public means of instruction. We can hardly suppose, that such are seeking first, or chiefly, the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof. I believe it is the practice with many servants, to make it a stipulation with the families in which they are placed, that they shall have certain opportunities of attending public worship, not only on the Lord's day, but at other seasons. All this is so far well. It is certainly proper, that a master or mistress should know what is expected by their servants, to prevent misunderstandings afterwards; and should acquiesce in it when they receive them under their roof. I should

think it, however, far better, that the liberty of attending a church meeting, for example, of a week-day evening, should be rather a thing understood, when nothing particular came in the way to prevent it, than that it should be a matter of express stipulation. Even where it was expressly stipulated, a servant would do much more to recommend the Gospel, by occasionally relinquishing the privilege, when particular circumstances rendered their absence from the family inconvenient, than by tenaciously insisting that such a stipulation be fulfilled.

The grand question with every Christian, whether master or servant, ought to be, how is it that I shall most effectually glorify my Father who is in heaven? Here, then, Christian servants ought to take into calculation, the prejudices that disregarding the comfort or convenience of others may excite against them, and how much any influence connected with their example may thus be diminished. To persons of any discernment, this will often be found more than to overbalance any personal benefit which, from attending a particular meeting, they may be supposed to derive.

But here a difficulty may occur. It may be alleged, that unless the privilege of attending public worship, at certain seasons, be a matter of express stipulation, there are many masters and mistresses who would seldom find it convenient to let their servants enjoy it at all. Things would be almost perpetually occurring, which would require their presence at home; and thus they might be jostled out of their privileges altogether. Wherever servants are thus treated, I should think it much better,

after temperately and respectfully remonstrating on their disappointment, if the remonstrance proved ineffectual, to submit to the inconvenience, till an opportunity occurred of changing their situation. Such a conduct is surely far better, than if they could even gain their object, after quarrelling and disputing about it. Where servants recommend themselves by fidelity and attention, there are few heads of families, however prejudiced, so blind to their own comfort and interests, as to part with faithful servants, rather than allow them, as far as possible, such privileges as they can reasonably desire. But if it should be otherwise; if either the circumstances, the violent prejudices, or the inconsideration of the family, should render a removal necessary, servants would, in this case, have the satisfaction of reflecting, that there was nothing in their conduct, or in the temper they manifested, that was calculated to give an occasion for offence against the principles they professed.

Let no Christian servant be offended at these hints, and suppose that, because they come from one who is in the situation of a master, they have rather a favourable aspect to those who are in the same station. They must have very false views of Christianity indeed, who are not convinced that there is a much closer bond of union between a Christian servant and a Christian master, than between the latter and any head of a family whatever, who is a stranger to the faith and hope of the Gospel. The one is a mere similarity in external circumstances for a few years; the other is a bond of union which shall subsist through eternity.

On such principles, I would say to every servant professing godliness — “You and I are one, united by the most important tie. Though God has placed us in different stations in society, and though Christianity, instead of destroying such a difference in our external situations, plainly countenances it, by inculcating the duties peculiarly connected with each, we ought to have the same great object in view, — the advancement of the divine glory in the world. It has often, I can assure you, been a subject of pain and regret to pastors, to hear complaints made of servants under their pastoral care, where the complaint was founded on something which, in point of imprudence, or impropriety at least, if it went no farther, was really indefensible. I am well aware, that the faults of servants may be often exaggerated, especially by those prejudiced against their principles; and that, where there are differences between the heads of families and their servants, the fault as often lies on the one side as on the other. But, at present I am speaking to you. The sole object of the above hints, is to render you as free from faults as possible, and to point out the manner in which it appears to me, that, in your particular station, you may most effectually recommend the religion of Jesus to all around you.

“We have sometimes heard of delightful instances of the Christian deportment of believing servants being instrumental in awakening the attention of some, in the families in which they were placed, to those principles by which such a conduct was produced. Can any thing be conceived more desirable, than being thus the honoured instruments of leading

any to the knowledge of God our Saviour? Let the possibility of this inspire every servant professing godliness with the utmost circumspection, fidelity, and watchfulness. Where you are connected with believing masters, (though they belong to a different denomination of professing Christians from yourself,) this consideration should prove an additional incitement to the diligent discharge of every duty. Besides the general call to conscientious service, founded on the express command of the word of God, you have here an additional impulse, from the attachment you ought to feel to them, as bearing the image of the Lord Jesus, and as fellow heirs of the grace of life. Such is the inference the Apostle Paul draws from this consideration, as recorded, 1 Tim. 6:1, 2. 'Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.'

"Let me here suppose a case which may sometimes happen. You may perhaps not question the Christianity of the heads of the family in which you are placed, but you may think their sentiments on some points very erroneous. Admitting, then, your supposition to be just, you must surely, from love to their souls, wish that these erroneous sentiments may be corrected. Now, what is the most likely way to produce this effect, and what is the kind of influence in helping to produce it, which from your

particular situation you possess? It certainly is by exhibiting, in your own temper and conduct, the very beneficial effects which flow from those peculiar principles, by the profession of which you are distinguished."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HUMAN NATURE TO BE STUDIED, IN ADMINISTERING REPROOF.

WHEN a Christian is unavoidably thrown into the society of the worldly, or the profane; when, for example, in travelling, he meets with such characters, it has been often, I believe, a point of some difficulty, to determine what is the path of duty in his intercourse with them. If he is to oppose every incorrect sentiment he hears expressed, this almost amounts to putting an end to conversation altogether, as there is hardly a sentiment such persons entertain, which, when fairly examined, will not be found at variance with the word of God. The same remark may be made, if he is to make every improper mode of expression the subject of his animadversions.

In such situations, it is a very enviable talent, where a person can give conversation a useful turn, or at least occasionally mingle with it some remark of this description. Such a talent ought to be care-

fully improved, where it is possessed; and where it is not, it is well worthy of being studiously cultivated. But though this gift is not the portion of every Christian, there is one attainment which is within the reach of all, and that is, avoiding any indication, either in our manner, our looks, or our language, that we approve what is wrong. If we should think it expedient to administer a reproof to one, for example, who is chargeable with profane swearing, we should be careful to do it in such a way, that the end is most likely to be attained. If we can previously secure the good-will or favourable opinion of the party, either by the intelligence of our conversation, or by any little personal services, it is a most desirable preliminary, and may contribute much to pave the way for the proper reception of any hint we may suggest.

We need hardly remark, that wherever reproof is thus administered, it ought to be eminently in the spirit of mildness and affection. If done in a different spirit, the end is almost certain of being defeated. But we would particularly notice, that such an attempt will, in general, only be found successful, (so far successful at least, as to be taken in good part,) where it is made while a person is alone. If, for example, while travelling in a stage-coach, you meet with one who, in conversation, expresses himself in a profane or improper manner, if, instead of reproving him before the rest of the passengers, you embrace an opportunity of talking to him by himself, at the end of a stage, it is not improbable that he will hear you with attention. But if the same friendly admonition had been given him in the

presence of others, it is likely his pride would have been roused ; and he might have either treated you with ridicule, or been filled with indignation. Human nature ought certainly to be studied in such circumstances ; and in attempting to do good, the most likely way of succeeding ought ever to be kept in view.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VIEW OF THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HEART.

It is impossible to enumerate the various ways in which the deceitfulness of the human heart appears. One of these, however, which is not uncommon, consists in men's indulging themselves in a considerable degree of devotedness to the world, under the guise of increasing their wealth, with a view to employ it in the service of God.

It is indeed very manifest, that property in the possession of a Christian, is a valuable means of usefulness. By the judicious application of it, he may be instrumental in extensively advancing the interests of the Messiah's kingdom. It is this that gives so plausible, and so apparently Christian an aspect, to a desire to add to our wealth, with the view of promoting such an object. But much watchfulness is here requisite. Though we set out with this object, and in some measure continue to keep it in view ; yet, in the act of adding to our

property, we may materially injure our own spiritual interests. The business of the world may so completely engross our thoughts, that no method of applying that property, after it is acquired, however well intended, or actually useful, will compensate for that inordinate occupation of mind about the things of the present life, which we may have indulged in the act of obtaining them.

Christians possessed of property, ought to be very careful in the conscientious application of it. It is a valuable talent entrusted to them, and they must at last give an account of the use they have made of it. But as the world is one of the most formidable foes which Christians have to encounter; as it has a perpetual tendency, in one way or another, to seduce our thoughts from those objects which ought supremely to occupy them; we ought to be not the less on our guard against its ensnaring influence, though, like the arch-enemy of human happiness, it should transform itself into an angel of light; though it should solicit our pursuit, under the plausible form of employing what we acquire of it, in the service of God.

CHAPTER XX.

ON INDULGING MEN'S PREJUDICES.

It has often been asked, how far men's prejudices may be indulged, consistently with a proper regard to divine truth. Though this is a question, which

seems in many cases not of very easy solution; yet one thing is obvious, that on this point, as well as others, we are apt to fall into one of two opposite extremes.

Some, in their intercourse with those who are strangers to Christianity, will do nothing whatever to meet their prejudices. They rather seem disposed to shock them even in trifles, with a view, it would appear, the more prominently to mark the difference between their principles and their own, and to show that they can meet them in no point, so long as they are living in unbelief. Others are inclined, on the other hand, to indulge the prejudices of worldly persons so far, that they will not only accommodate to them in matters confessedly of trifling import, but will even conceal some important principles of divine truth, or at least endeavour to palliate what may be offensive in these truths, lest such characters should be offended by them.

However much we may disapprove of the imprudence and unaccommodating spirit, sometimes discovered in the former extreme; the latter certainly no less deserves condemnation. It is a kind of carnal policy on which we can never expect the divine blessing. If we hope to be useful to the soul of any man, it must be in the way that God has appointed; by the fair development and undisguised display of those doctrines, however humbling and repulsive, which are contained in his word.

Without pretending to draw the precise line how far an accommodation to men's prejudices is lawful, we may remark, that Scripture seems to countenance a degree of this accommodation, when we have

to do with those whom we cannot view as Christians, which it does not allow to be exercised to such as profess to be under the influence of divine truth. This observation is founded on the conduct of Paul, on two different occasions. The one is recorded Acts 16:2, where the Apostle is represented as getting Timothy circumcised, because of the Jews that were in those quarters, because they knew his father was a Greek. Here Paul was plainly influenced by the consideration of Timothy's usefulness. He was desirous that this young disciple should submit to an institution, which he well knew to be superseded, that, by this accommodation to the prejudices of the Jewish nation, he might have more extensive access to them, and thus be more likely to promote their spiritual welfare.

The Apostle's conduct, however, was very different in the other case referred to, which is recorded Gal. 2:11. On this occasion, Peter had shown a disposition to humour the improper prejudices, not of those who were yet living in unbelief, but of those who professed faith in Jesus, and of course professed that they were bound in all things to submit to his authority. The obligation of the ceremonial law was now abolished. But Peter, instead of holding up this truth to the Jewish converts by his own conduct, though he was himself convinced of it, and accordingly lived as the Gentiles, that is, partook of any kind of food, where no Jews were present; as soon as the Jewish converts arrived, he, in accommodation to their prejudices, disguised his sentiments, withdrew from the Gentiles, and lived as did the Jews. This, as we learn from the passage

referred to, Paul opposed in the most decided manner ; and it would appear that Peter did not attempt to vindicate his conduct.

From the difference of Paul's procedure in these two cases, we are led, I think, to the following conclusion. When he had to do with those who were yet in unbelief, his great object was to get them made acquainted with the Gospel. He was willing to adopt any method, not involving the direct sacrifice of truth, by which this could be obtained. But when men professed to believe the Gospel, his great object was, that their knowledge of divine truth should be enlarged, and no prejudice was to be allowed, by which their views might be obscured, or their progress retarded. He considered himself as having a very different hold of Christians, from what he had of worldly men. He was entitled, from their profession, to speak to them in a different manner, and to expect from them a different line of conduct. As they professed to acknowledge the authority of the King of Zion, he had a right to expect immediate submission to it, in spite of every opposite sentiment, wherever that authority was fairly shown to be interposed. The same expectation is surely not less reasonable in every age. This general principle no Christian can deny, whatever reasonings any may adopt in particular cases, to evade the application of it. It is an interesting consideration, and one that ought never to be absent from the minds of Christians, that "the word which Jesus has spoken, is that which shall judge a man at the last day." John 12:48. This ought to form a most irresistible inducement to see, that, laying aside

every prejudice, we be found at present universally submitting to its authority, so far as we know it; and that every part of our conduct be influenced by this rule.

CHAPTER XXI.

SOME VIOLATIONS OF CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLE IN CONDUCTING BUSINESS.

EVERY one who has attended to our Lord's commentary on the second table of the law, must have been struck with its peculiar excellence. "Whatsoever ye would that others should do to you, do ye even so to them." When we reflect on the simplicity, and at the same time the comprehensiveness of this rule — on its being so easily understood by the most ignorant — so easily recollected, and at the same time its being so completely applicable to every one of that vast variety of cases that exists in the intercourse of human beings; we shall clearly see that it carries the stamp of divinity in its own bosom.

But, while all admit the general excellence of the rule, there are many violations of it which, though not cognizable by any human laws, are so extremely common in the intercourse of business, that even Christians, unless they are much upon their guard, are very apt to fall into them. A few of these I shall mention, and though I am aware that, in some

of the following remarks, many of my brethren may differ from me, I shall have the happiness of directing the attention of some, at least, to a subject which they may not have thought of before.

In the first place, I consider, that, other things being equal, Christians ought to countenance one another in the intercourse of business. If they act consistently, they may be often called to suffer on account of their principles; and it seems but reasonable that they should expect support from those with whom they are connected by that powerful bond, which union in the faith of the Gospel implies. Again, if the belief of the Gospel be justly considered as a powerful link connecting all the disciples of Christ, this, it would seem, should operate with peculiar force where Christians are united in church fellowship. This appears to me a much closer tie than many seem to apprehend it. If, for example, I am connected, by this very intimate bond, with one who is in a particular line of business; it seems but reasonable that I should employ that person rather than a stranger,* provided especially he can serve me equally well, and on the same terms. If this, then, is a reasonable expectation on the part of a Christian brother, and if I would feel this, if placed in his situation and he in mine, let those consider how far they act according to this great rule, who, in the transactions of business, prefer one with whom they have no connexion.

There are also certain natural connexions in life, such as old and early friendship, and the tie of rela-

* I have said a stranger here, because, if a person has a relation of his own in the same line of business, it alters the case

tionship, which ought to be regarded in the intercourse of business, unless there is some good reason for overlooking them. As I believe this is often done from mere want of consideration, it is the more necessary to direct the attention of Christians to this subject. It has been a very common remark, in the prosecution of business, that a man often receives more countenance and support from mere strangers than from his own connexions. But, unless there be some good reason for it, there is surely something wrong when this remark is fairly applicable. In the catalogue of Christian graces mentioned, Phil. 4:8. the expression, "Whatsoever things are lovely," has been very properly rendered, *whatsoever things are friendly*. A disposition to be friendly to all, as we have opportunity, but especially to those who seem to have a natural claim on our friendly offices, is a lovely feature in the Christian character, and a respect to such connexions as those mentioned seems almost necessarily included in the class of relative duties; especially, if we take our Lord's very extensive application of the second table of the law, above referred to, as the rule by which these duties ought to be regulated. There may be reasons, in some cases, for overlooking these connexions in matters of business. Where these exist, it would perhaps be better that they should be fairly stated. If they are satisfactory, this would tend to remove the offence which an apparently unfriendly, and of course so far an inconsistent conduct, in a professing Christian, is apt to produce.

Again, do we not often see a strong disposition to violate this rule, in that competition for business

which takes place in the world? This is done when any attempt is made to depreciate the goods of a neighbour, or when any thing is said, falsely, that is injurious to his character, or, even though it be true, if we are not directly called to give an opinion on the subject. It is done when any underhand method is adopted by one engaged in business, to withdraw the customers of a neighbour, and secure them to himself. Suppose, for example, I send a present to one with whom I have no connexion, but who I know employs another with whom he is connected by relationship, or some other particular bond; if I do this with the secret wish or design of obtaining the employment of that individual, or if I make use of any other means to accomplish the same end, I certainly am violating this great commandment.

I have also known certain professing Christians, in their rage for cheap articles, willing to purchase goods at such a rate, that it was manifest they could only be sold at the price by desperate characters, who were plainly defrauding their creditors in order to serve a temporary purpose. The evil of doing so proceeds upon the supposition that the purchasers in question have access to know that this is the case. Such persons would be shocked at the idea of purchasing articles directly stolen, and yet it becomes them to consider if there is any very material difference between such a case and that which I have here stated. Whatever others do, surely Christians ought to consider well before they give any countenance to such transactions. They however do so when they purchase goods at such a rate, and in such circumstances, that they have every reason to

conclude that those who sell them are sacrificing the property of others to their own personal accommodation. I am aware it may be alleged, the goods are going at any rate ; and, if so, why should I not get a little benefit from such a sale as well as another ? It ought to be recollected here, that, while those who purchase goods in such circumstances, encourage dishonesty on the one hand, they injure the fair tradesman on the other. But the spirit of this argument for encouraging such a practice,—that the goods are going at all events whether I purchase them or not,—is so well answered by a short poem of Cowper's on the slave trade, that I shall insert it as containing all the reply that is here requisite.

The author, after stating the argument used by some in favour of our continuing the slave trade, from the consideration that other nations will carry it on whether we do so, or not, thus points out its fallacy:—

A youngster at school, more sedate than the rest,
Had once his integrity put to the test ;
His comrades had plotted an orchard to rob,
And asked him to go and assist in the job.

He was shocked, sir, like you, and answered, " Oh ! no !
What ! rob our good neighbour ! I pray you don't go ;
Besides, the man's poor, his orchard's his bread,
Then think of his children, for they must be fed."

" You speak very fine, and you look very grave,
But apples we want, and apples we'll have :
If you will go with us you shall have a share ;
If not, you shall have neither apple nor pear."

They spoke, and Tom pondered—" I see they will go ;
Poor man ! what a pity to injure him so !

Poor man! I would save him his fruit if I could,
But staying behind will do him no good:

If the matter depended alone upon me,
His apples might hang till they drop from the tree;
But since they will take them, I think I'll go too;
He will lose none by me though I get a few."

His scruples thus silenced, Tom felt more at ease,
And went with his comrades the apples to seize;
He blamed and protested, but joined in the plan—
He shared in the plunder, but pitied the man.

I need add no other illustrations of the way in which this rule is violated. Many of these will occur in the intercourse of life. But here ought to be one grand mark of distinction between a disciple of Christ and other men. One who takes the word of God for his rule, will not inquire what is customary or allowed by others in the line of business in which he is engaged, but he will study at all times to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man. It must be admitted, that he may sometimes suffer in the intercourse of business by doing so. But if he should, he suffers in a good cause, and must have a much higher source of satisfaction than if he enjoyed a greater degree of prosperity, if accompanied with the violation of any part of the word of God.

But may I not here add, that it has frequently happened, that, in this case, that declaration of Scripture has been fulfilled,—that godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. Some instances I have known in which a well-established consistency and conscientiousness of character was the means of securing such a degree of public confidence as led to a meas-

ure of success in the business of life, which was not likely to be attained in any other way. Success thus obtained is most honourable to the possessor of it. But whether this should be the effect of fidelity or not, let every man professing godliness study in all things to walk so as to please God; and never do to others what, in similar circumstances, he would not approve of others doing to him.

CHAPTER XXII.

SYMPATHY WITH THE DISTRESSED, CALCULATED
TO REMOVE PREJUDICES AGAINST OUR CHRISTIAN
PROFESSION.

“ALL that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” Every one who knows what Christianity is, knows that every Christian has many prejudices to encounter. As there is a radical difference between his principles and those of worldly men, he must lay his account with being viewed by them with a jealous eye. Many endeavour to do away these prejudices, by very unlawful means. One of these is, attempting to make the difference between mere men of the world and themselves appear of little moment, by such an accommodation to their maxims and manners, as tends greatly to conceal this difference from their view.

There is, however, one mode of softening down

men's opposition, which has this peculiar recommendation, that, while it is often a very powerful one, it is also perfectly lawful. I mean, endeavouring to promote their external comfort, by doing them any kind service that lies in our power, and especially by showing our sympathy with them, while under affliction. In the season of personal, or family distress, the pride of the human heart is often, for the time at least, considerably subdued; and we frequently find men then, disposed to receive with complacency, and even with gratitude, those soothing alleviations which arise from tender sympathy, even from such as they would at other times be inclined to treat with indifference, hostility, or contempt.

Here, then, is a fine field for the disciples of Jesus to endeavour to counteract the prejudices, which may be entertained against their principles, by manifesting the amiable spirit of genuine Christianity. It will generally be found, that any attentions that are paid to persons in distress, make a deeper impression, and are longer remembered, than services that are done to them at other times. The following reasons may be assigned for this. In such a situation, a man is likely to feel more forcibly his dependence on others, than at any other period. The time of distress, too, is frequently one at which a man's worldly friends are most apt to desert him.

At such a season, then, let the Christian step forward. Attentions, which at other times might have been considered as officious, will often then be gladly welcomed. Full of the benevolence of his divine Master, with sympathy in his heart, and

kindness in his eye, let him spare no pains, nor personal inconvenience, in endeavouring to mitigate human calamity. Let him listen, with patient attention, to the tale of affliction. Let him enter into every circumstance of distress, with that interest and solicitude which the spirit of Christian kindness would inspire ; and, amidst the various vicissitudes of feeling he may have occasion to witness, let him eagerly watch the happy moment for endeavouring to lead the attention of the sufferer to the only source of consolation. In this way, if he should do nothing more, he may leave an indelible impression on the conscience of the afflicted, that Christianity is not that morose, unfeeling, and unsocial system, which some would attempt to represent it ; but that it disposes every one who embraces it, like its divine Author, to do good to all, as he has opportunity ; and where he cannot altogether remove distress, at least to weep with those that weep, while he travels along with them through this valley of tears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FEW QUESTIONS, FITTED TO PROMOTE AMONG
CHRISTIANS A SPIRIT OF MUTUAL FORBEARANCE.

IN order to soften down those asperities which are too often produced, where Christians differ in sentiment from one another, and to promote, in such

cases, a spirit of mutual forbearance, the following questions may perhaps be proposed with some advantage.

Suppose, in some points, I have discovered the divine will, where others of my Christian brethren I think have not: Have I kept that discovery in its own place? Am I certain I have not attached a disproportionate importance to it; and is not this as really improper as overlooking it altogether?—Has not my attention been directed to this portion of divine truth by the circumstances of my situation; and had it not been for these, is it not probable I should have indulged prejudices against it, as well as others?—Am I certain that there is no other portion of the word of God which I am neglecting, either from my criminal carelessness, in not searching the Scriptures, and thus overlooking it altogether, or, under the influence of prejudice, resisting evidence which ought to command my assent?—While I am conscious of many deviations from the path of duty, where I know what that path is, may not my guilt be greater than that of those who do not discern some parts of the will of God, though it be owing to some false prepossession that they continue ignorant of them? Nay, do I not here too much resemble those who even resist conviction where it is felt?

Again, am I authorized in any case to suppose that a man resists conviction, though he is not convinced by evidence which to me appears most conclusive?—Is it not easy to account for his overlooking that evidence, or his not feeling its force, by his early education, by those circumstances in his

past history or his present situation, over which he has had little or no control; and ought I not to ascribe his not being influenced by such evidence to this cause, instead of charging him with deliberately resisting a conviction which he really feels? — Have I not contributed to strengthen the prejudices of some, against what I believe to be a part of divine truth, by the unsuitable temper with which I have sometimes defended it; by manifesting a feeling of conscious superiority, and treating, with a certain degree of contempt, those who hold an opposite opinion from me, or by laying an undue stress on the particular point on which we differed, and overlooking the far more important truths in which we were agreed?

Further: Few deny that forbearance ought to be exercised on some subjects where there is a difference of sentiment, and all maintain that there is a point at which it should stop; that there are differences quite incompatible with Christian fellowship. Now, suppose I have acted conscientiously in regard to the exercise of my forbearance, can I decidedly say that I have clearly discovered that point beyond which it should not extend; that I have in no degree deviated from the standard of Scripture, by declining Christian fellowship with those with whom it will appear at last I ought to have maintained it; or by holding it with those from whom I ought to have separated? — When constrained, from a sense of duty, to separate from others, have I not only done so at the precise point where it was proper to do it, but have I done it in the manner, and in the spirit, which the great Lawgiver will at last approve? —

While acting with others in a church capacity, have I at all times manifested that patience and forbearance with those who viewed things in a different light from myself, which I ought to have exercised? — Should not the possibility of my own deviations from the standard of truth and duty on these points, lead me to judge with tenderness of those who differ from me?

Above all, if I conceive that I have by any means discovered some parts of the will of God, which others have overlooked, of which they are either ignorant, or which, through the influence of certain temptations, they neglect, though they know them; has this increased knowledge been accompanied with that increase of humility, of spirituality of mind, of devotedness to the glory of God, which ought to have accompanied it; or have I never been inclined secretly to plume myself on my supposed clearer discernment, and more extensive knowledge, and thus converted that into an occasion of sin, which ought to have led to an increase of holiness?

Let every one professing to be a disciple of Christ, to whatever denomination he belongs, bring home these questions to his own conscience, but let him, at the same time, observe with what view they are proposed; — not to lead any one to conceive, that it is of little moment whether on any point he hold truth or error. No! To a man who feels that reverence for the divine authority which he ought, and who is looking forward to the second coming of the Lord, nothing in this world can be half so interesting as discovering the will of God as it is communicated in his word, and acting agreeably to that

discovery. But these questions are proposed with a view to promote a spirit of mutual forbearance among those who, though in some points they differ, are united in the faith and hope of the Gospel—that forbearance which, in this world of remaining imperfection, they certainly ought to cultivate, by which they will be preserved from throwing those stumbling-blocks before the world, which have often been occasioned by the want of it, and in the exercise of which they will most effectually adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ADMONITIONS TO MEMBERS OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES.

MANY of us, my Christian brethren, have had our attention, of late years, more particularly directed to the important subject of Christian fellowship, and to the obligation of observing that discipline which the Lord Jesus hath appointed. We have considered, that Christian churches ought to be composed only of those who profess to be the disciples of Christ, and who do not plainly belie that profession by their conduct. Of course, we have concluded, that such as give evidence in their lives that they are strangers to this character, ought not to be found among the members of them.

But it certainly never was imagined by any of us, that Christians are free from the remainders of corruption, and that they are not perpetually in danger of being withdrawn from their steadfastness. Nay, it never was imagined, that very improper characters might not creep in unawares into any church. This took place in the apostolic age ; and the same thing is to be expected still. We never pretend to interfere with the divine prerogative of judging the heart ; all we lay claim to is, that we judge according to appearances, — we try men by their fruits.

We accordingly receive those into our communion, who appear to be disciples of Jesus. When any one of our members falls into sin, we endeavour to put in practice the salutary discipline which the Lord has instituted for the benefit of his church. When any one gives evidence, by ungodly conduct, that he is a stranger to the faith of the Gospel, we are convinced that we do what is most for his best interests, when we obey the command of Jesus, to exclude such a one from our society. The commendation expressed of the church of Ephesus, Rev. 2:2, by him who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, was designed, we believe, for our admonition, and for the instruction of churches in every age. “They did not bear them that were evil.” This, we are persuaded, is all that can be done on earth. It is impossible to guard against improper characters being *found* in a church ; but it is possible to prevent them from *continuing*, after they are discovered.

I may here repeat a remark, which I had once occasion to make in another publication, that “the

importance to the safety of individuals, of correct views of Christian communion, and of brethren in a church feeling their obligations to warn each other against the dangers to which they are exposed, may perhaps be aptly enough illustrated by the following anecdote which occurred in Captain Cook's first voyage. In a high southern latitude, near the extremity of South America, Mr. Banks and Dr. Solander, with other ten, went ashore to examine the country; but as they had gone to a considerable distance, night came on before they could return to the ship. As the air was excessively cold, Dr. Solander, who well knew that extreme cold, especially when joined with fatigue, produces a torpor and sleepiness almost irresistible, conjured the company to keep moving, whatever pain it might cost them, and whatever relief they might be promised by an inclination to sleep. 'Whoever sits down,' says he, 'will sleep; and whoever sleeps will wake no more. Thus,' adds our author, 'at once admonished and alarmed, they set forward; but the cold became suddenly so intense, as to produce the effects that had been most dreaded. Dr. Solander himself was the first who found the inclination, against which he had warned others, irresistible, and insisted on being suffered to lie down.'"—Mark here the value of association, and of those connected in a society taking a friendly interest in one another's safety and welfare. Professing Christians, like these circumnavigators, are apt to fall asleep; and if this be indulged, they may sleep the sleep of death. In a society, however, this tendency is not so likely to seize all at once. When one is

affected by it, the friendly exertions of his brethren may contribute to rouse him, and, when his vigour and activity are renewed, he may perhaps have occasion to repay to each, in turn, the friendly offices which in time of need he received from him. In this delightful kind of intercourse which the Lord Jesus has established among his people, we have duty and interest combined.

While, then, we consider it not only the indispensable duty, but the high privilege, of every Christian church, to observe that discipline which the Lord Jesus hath appointed, we would at the same time wish it indelibly impressed upon the mind of every member, that it is very possible to have such a profession, that none of our brethren can object to it, while the heart may not be right with God; while the man has never had just views of the Gospel of Christ, nor experienced that transforming energy upon the character, which the belief of it invariably produces. We are often reminded we cannot search the heart. This we admit in its fullest latitude. Nay, we will go farther. Not only are many things, which enter most deeply into the determining of our state, and the formation of our character before God, totally unknown to our brethren; but many parts even of our external conduct lie quite beyond the reach of their observation, and of course cannot be the subject of their Christian watchfulness. The attention of the reader is requested to the following illustrations of this remark.

First, "There is a certain secret chamber of the mind," says one, "to which no one has access but God, and a man's self." The state of the soul in

secret is entirely a matter of consciousness. It is only known to the person himself, and to that God with whom he has to do. Thus, a man may be greatly prospering in the spiritual life; he may be rapidly improving in the knowledge of divine truth; he may be discovering from day to day more of its glorious excellence, and experiencing large measures of that peculiar and exalted enjoyment which an impressive view of the divine character, as exhibited in the Gospel, is fitted to communicate. In connexion with this, his discovery of the evil of sin, and his consequent hatred of it, will in like manner grow apace; while his increasing admiration of Him whom his soul loveth, must be accompanied with a corresponding progressive resemblance to his image, and with vigorous, habitual, and unre-served devotedness to his glory.

But is this the uniform description of every Christian? Would God it were! Alas! is not this picture often, in a great measure, reversed? Is there not often much reason to lament a comparatively small improvement in knowledge, and but feeble impressions of that truth, which yet we view as our only source of consolation while travelling through this wilderness? Instead of feeling, in its proper force, that habitual impression of the reality and importance of eternal things, under which we should live from day to day, how often does our intercourse with the world tend to enfeeble it, and too much to transfer our affections and thoughts to objects infinitely less worthy to occupy them? And, instead of that unremitting zeal and activity in the service of God, which is so desirable, how often

do the hands hang down, and the knees become feeble?

We do not here mean to insinuate, that the state of the soul before God, whether prospering, or the reverse, will have no effect on the conversation and conduct; and that it will not thus, in some measure, discover itself to others. This is impossible. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." As the fruit invariably indicates the nature of the tree, so the state of a man's mind must, in one degree or another, be manifested by the general tenor of his conduct. All that we assert is, that, as the secret state of the soul is unknown to others, there may be much of what is wrong there; while, at the same time, there is no such open and prominent deficiency in the character, as may strike the attention of others, or afford materials even for personal admonition or reproof, far less for the public discipline of a church of Christ. This remark will come home, I believe, to the bosom of every man who is accustomed to look into the state of his own mind, as in the sight of God; and if it be just, it certainly furnishes a powerful incitement to serious self-examination, watchfulness, and prayer.

Again: Christians are placed in various relations in life, as husbands or wives, parents or children, masters or servants. There may be, then, much deficiency in the discharge of the relative duties that are incumbent upon us; while neither a pastor has access to know that deficiency, nor, from the situation in which we are placed, can it come within the observation of any of our brethren. Thus, how many unseemly displays of an unchristian temper

may take place in domestic life, the knowledge of which may be confined to the individual who is the object of our irritation or resentment, or can only extend to the rest of the family who live under the same roof. Besides, where there is no open and flagrant violation of a particular duty, there may be a material defect in the steadiness and zeal with which it may be discharged. Though servants, for example, may not be positively unfaithful, there may be a considerable deficiency in the solicitude they discover to promote the comfort or interest of those they are called to serve. In like manner, though the head of a family should discover no direct cruelty, bad temper, or injustice to his wife, his children, or his servants, there may be a material want of that positive Christian sympathy and kindness, of that spirit of accommodation, that desire to promote the happiness of others, which, in the relations of domestic life, should adorn the character of those who fear God. Children, without expressly disobeying their parents, may discover but little disposition habitually to gratify their wishes, or administer to their comfort. Parents, on the other hand, may not altogether neglect the religious instruction of their children, while, at the same time, there may be a great deficiency in that regularity and assiduity with which it is attended to; in the fervency with which they pray for them; in the affection and earnestness with which they admonish them to attend to the things that belong to their peace; in short, in that uniform and deep concern about their best interests, which all Christian parents ought to feel, and which alone will lead them, in the genuine spirit

of the expression, to "bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Another case, to which neither the watchfulness of a pastor, nor that which ought to be exercised by Christian brethren, can very easily extend, relates to the degree in which a man employs his property in the service of God. This, however, certainly goes a great way to determine a person's real character. If any one be fairly chargeable with covetousness, or the love of this world, whatever his profession be, the love of the Father is not in him. There are cases, indeed, in which this may, and ought to become the subject of Christian admonition and discipline. If it is obvious, from the style in which a man lives, that he has property to expend on his dress or his table, or on luxuries of whatever kind, while he can afford comparatively little to alleviate the distresses of his brethren, or promote the cause of God in the world, there must be something radically wrong. Such a man must be deceiving himself in professing Christianity. He is ignorant of its spirit; and if he do not see his error, after patient and affectionate admonition, his brethren seem plainly called to undeceive him, by excluding him from the church. This observation is founded on covetousness being stated as a sin, which in certain cases can be distinctly ascertained, and to which the discipline of a church of Christ ought to be applied: 1 Cor. 5:11.

But there are other cases, where a man's circumstances in the world are in a great measure unknown, and where they cannot be known without prying into them in a manner that would be very unjustifi-

able. Thus, a man may be prospering in business, which, though unknown to others, is known to himself. But instead of sowing bountifully, or, according to the divine command, giving as the Lord hath prospered him, he may be doing little more for the relief of the destitute, or for the support and spread of the Gospel, than when his ability was much more limited. Besides, among such as are prosperous in life, some may have claims, by those that are dependent on them, of such a nature as considerably to abridge their power of communicating pecuniary aid to promote other objects. In short, it is manifest, that this is another case to which the watchfulness of our Christian brethren cannot frequently extend, and that it must be in a great measure left to a man's own mind, to what extent he employs his property in supporting the destitute, or in contributing to promote the cause of the Lord Jesus in the world.

Again: Private offences in churches are often to be met with. Here it is plainly the duty of the offended party, to go and tell his offending brother his fault. When this is done, however, very different degrees of satisfaction may be obtained. Sometimes the offender is ready to give the most full and explicit acknowledgment of what is wrong; takes the reproof in good part; and shows every disposition, as much as possible, to remove the offence from the mind of his brother. Nothing can be more satisfactory, or more completely calculated to heal any difference, than the manifestation of such a spirit.

But this is not always the temper with which reproof is received. It sometimes manifestly excites disgust. Instead of a frank acknowledgment of

what is wrong, there is often rather a disposition to palliate it; and though, perhaps, some acknowledgment may at last be made, which prevents the business from being carried any farther, yet it is so constrained, so reluctantly given, that it can afford but little satisfaction. It is plain, then, that this is another of those deficiencies to which neither pastoral nor mutual watchfulness can be applied. The offended party cannot, with propriety, make the offence known to others, unless his brother refuse to hear him. But though he may seem to hear him in a certain degree, there may be much to blame in the manner in which he treats the admonition; there may be a great deficiency in the temper and spirit with which he receives it.

I shall only suggest one case more. There may be a want of the full exercise of mutual affection and confidence between brethren, even where it may not have gone so far as to furnish materials for such an offence as requires admonition or rebuke. There may be, in reference to some brethren, a certain degree of shyness, of alienation, or disgust, generated by a variety of causes, which every one who knows what the spirit of Christianity is, knows to be a state of mind very inconsistent with it. If we realize, as we ought, the constant presence of the great Searcher of hearts, we shall tremble at the thought of such a frame of mind. Let us never harbor, even in the most secret manner, a single feeling, in reference to any of our fellow creatures, in the conscious indulgence of which we could not appear with confidence before the Judge of all.

Where any such alienation of mind, as that I have

noticed, exists, in reference to any of our brethren, there are two questions we should be disposed to ask ourselves. *First*, Have I reason to think it may have been owing to any thing improper in my temper, or imprudent in my language, in reference to my brother, which has given him any umbrage? If so, let me, by the most unreserved acknowledgment of any thing that could even border on offending him, for his good as well as my own, endeavour to have it done away. *Secondly*, Though I may be conscious, that any coolness that subsists between me and my brother, originated in a fault on his part; have I done whatever was in my power to have it removed? If such questions be fairly proposed, and every one be disposed to act according to that answer which the spirit of the Gospel will manifestly dictate, it is easy to see, that every unseemly feeling would be banished, and the most cordial, mutual confidence and affection would prevail. Let no one, then, rest satisfied that he is in a safe state, merely because he is connected with a church where Christian discipline is observed, while nothing appears in his conduct which subjects him to it.

This consideration ought forcibly to remind all of the solemn language of the Apostle, in his address to the churches of Galatia — “Every man shall bear his own burden.” What a striking thought! We shall not appear as collective bodies at last. But as each must pass alone into the world of spirits, so we must at last stand in our individual capacity, before the Judge of all. Every disguise will then be removed, and the state of every heart completely manifested. How awfully impressive, and deeply

interesting, is such a prospect; and what an interest is attached to our present state, from the close and indissoluble connexion it bears to it. As an eloquent writer has expressed it, "Every moment is immortal! Every moment shall return, and lay its whole freight, nothing lost, its every whisper, every thought, before the Throne—the Throne of Him who sent it to man on that commission; and commands it back at the stated day, to make its report; to be registered in eternity for the perusal of angels, and the justification of their King. Tell our gay triflers, that, with regard to man, eternity is absolutely the creature of time; that it is foul or fair, rejoices or laments, as time, omnipotent time, (that trifle which they throw away,) ordains its fate."

Let every man professing godliness, then, at the recollection of this truth, be powerfully incited to watchfulness and prayer. Let it lead him to great searching of heart; to examine himself, whether he be in the faith. Let him recollect, that he is still in a world of temptation, still in the field of danger; that still there is a possibility of his being withdrawn from his steadfastness. Along with this, let him remember to whom the promise of eternal life is confined. "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Keeping these solemn declarations full in his view, and feelingly alive to the incalculable, to the infinite importance of the glorious hope set before him, let the whole concentrated vigour of his mind be unremittingly and undeviatingly devoted to the final attainment of

it. Let it be the object of his unceasing solicitude to walk so as to please God ; to pass the time of his sojourning here in fear ; to occupy, with increasing fidelity, every talent of usefulness ; to have his loins girt, and his lamp burning, and to be as one who waiteth for the coming of the Lord.

To men living in carelessness, without any inquiry or concern about futurity, (and, alas ! the number of such is deplorably great,) the doctrine of scripture, respecting the solemnities of the judgment to come, and that they too, must appear before the tribunal of Jesus, ought certainly to suggest a no less solemn and impressive warning. As rational creatures, they cannot reflect upon the subject, without acknowledging that, in point of importance, every sublunary pursuit is less than nothing, and vanity, when put in competition with it. If, then, at the hour of trial, it shall appear, that they have gone through life supremely engrossed with the passing objects of the day, without ever having seriously examined the information which the God of heaven has given us respecting the world to come ; the prospects we are allowed to entertain in regard to it ; and the foundation on which these rest ; it cannot be denied that they shall be found chargeable with revolting from the best principles of their rational nature.

It is impossible, consistently with these principles, to conceive any apology for such a conduct. From what quarter can we at all imagine one to be drawn ? Ignorance of the subject cannot be pleaded. In a land of Bibles, this, if real, would only tend to establish their criminality. Ignorance of its importance would be equally irrelevant. This it carries in its

own bosom. Seriously to think of it, without perceiving its importance, is as impossible as to behold the sun without seeing its splendor. But can an apology, founded on deficiency of evidence, be sustained? No! This will be equally unavailing, while, in the concerns of life, men engage in the most important pursuits, on unspeakably inferior evidence, every day. In these cases men act according to the principles of that mental constitution God has given them. They are so formed as to be influenced by evidence. They accordingly are so, in every part of their intercourse with others around them. But how is it possible to exclude the charge of criminality, if we find the only deviation from this principle, — the only case in which evidence is resisted, or, in a matter of obvious importance to a man's own interests, neglected, — is, when it is interposed in confirmation of the revealed authority of the living God. Like the man, then, mentioned in one of the parables of our Lord, such characters must stand speechless, and the confusion they experience must be increased by the overwhelming recollection, that though the subject was presented to their attention; though its importance they could not for a moment question; though their own truest interests were plainly involved in the examination of it; that examination they neglected, and thus the aggravated guilt and folly recoil upon them, of having, by their own deliberate, wilful, and criminal carelessness, wronged, nay, ruined their own souls. OH! THAT MEN WERE WISE, THAT THEY KNEW THESE THINGS, THAT THEY CONSIDERED THEIR LATTER END.

Finis.





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